



CWHS

Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 2005 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Living in safe neighborhoods (both actual and perceived) is associated with behaviors that prevent obesity, particularly increased physical activity.¹ In a statewide telephone survey in the Midwest, respondents who felt that their neighborhoods were unsafe and unpleasant were 1.5 times more likely to be overweight than those who said they considered their neighborhoods to be safe and pleasant.² This is a relatively new area of study, and it is not clear what aspect of neighborhood safety is most related to maintaining a healthy weight. It is possible that the amenities that cause a neighborhood to be seen as safer and more pleasant contribute to an environment that is more conducive to physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

The 2005 California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) was administered to 4,623 women, proportionally weighted to the 2000 U.S. Census. Respondents were asked three questions about how they perceived their neighborhoods in terms of crime, traffic safety and pleasantness. Each item received a score from 1 (most negative) to 4 (most positive). Responses were combined into a three-item composite score, ranging from 12 (highest neighborhood satisfaction) to 3 (lowest neighborhood satisfaction). Differences between means were tested using Analysis of Variance.

All women were asked their height and weight to calculate body mass index (BMI, a measure of body density), except for those who were pregnant or six months post-partum or less. Categories of weight were as follows:

- Underweight: BMI < 18.5
- Healthy weight: BMI 18.5 - 24.9
- Overweight: BMI 25 - 29.9

- Obese: BMI \geq 30

Women were also asked on how many days each week they were moderately or vigorously physically active for at least 30 minutes. Those who fulfilled these criteria at least five days per week were categorized as meeting physical activity recommendations.³

Highlights of the survey are as follows:

- Most respondents (59.8 percent) perceived their neighborhoods as "very pleasant" places, 30.7 percent as "somewhat pleasant," 6.9 percent as "somewhat unpleasant," and 2.7 percent as "very unpleasant."
- More than half of respondents (53.4 percent) reported that they felt their neighborhoods to be "very safe" from criminal activity, 35.3 percent reported "somewhat safe," 8.5 percent reported "somewhat unsafe," and only 2.9 percent reported "very unsafe."
- Perception of traffic safety was more mixed; 38.7 percent reported "very safe," 43.0 percent reported "somewhat safe," 14.2 percent reported "somewhat unsafe," and 4.0 percent reported "very unsafe."
- Most respondents were very satisfied with one or more characteristics of their neighborhoods: nearly two out of three gave a combined neighborhood score of 10, 11 or 12; another 29.7 percent had more mixed feelings, scoring 7, 8, or 9. Only 6.0 percent of the women scored 6 or lower.

The Relationship between Healthy Weight, Physical Activity and Neighborhood Environmental Factors among California Women, 2005

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Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section

Public Health Message:

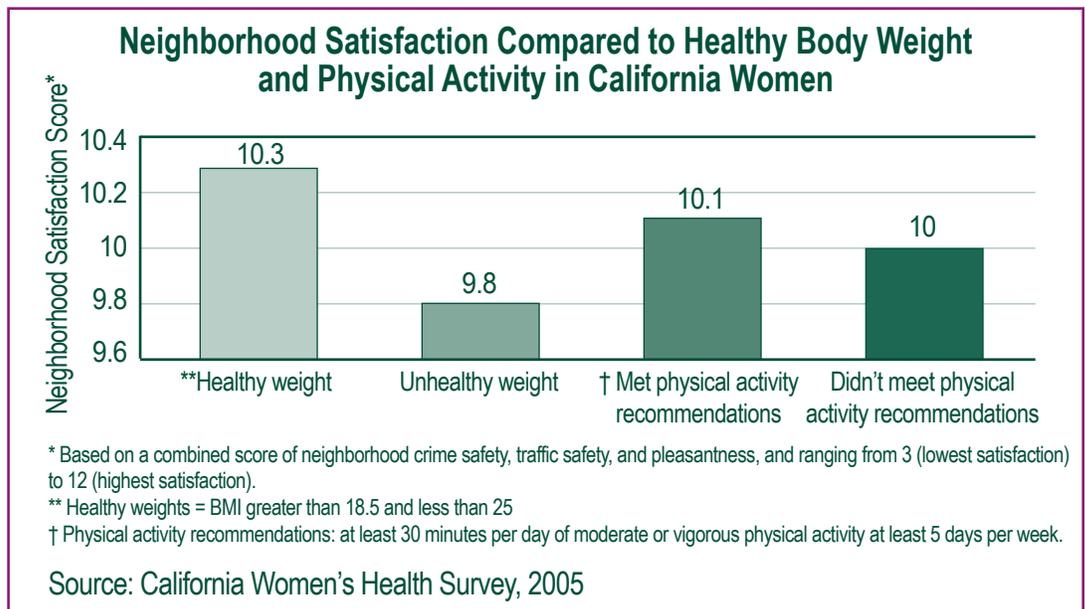
Neighborhood crime, traffic safety, and pleasantness have not traditionally been recognized areas for public health intervention. However, identification of the relationship between these environmental factors and healthy body weight and achieving adequate physical activity suggest these are appropriate and desirable issues of concern for public health professionals. People working to achieve obesity prevention goals in the public health sector should participate in programs and partnerships designed to improve neighborhood environments.

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- Fewer than half of the respondents (46.9 percent) had a healthy weight, 27.8 percent were overweight, 22.5 percent were obese, and 2.9 percent were underweight. Women with a healthy weight had significantly higher scores than those with an unhealthy weight (including both overweight and underweight women) on perceived overall neighborhood safety and satisfaction (10.3 vs. 9.8, respectively), perceived neighborhood crime (3.5 vs. 3.3, respectively), perceived safe neighborhood traffic (3.2 vs. 3.1, respectively), and perceived neighborhood pleasantness (3.6 vs. 3.4, respectively) ($P < .0001$ for all).
- Less than half the respondents (41.8 percent) reported at least 30 minutes per day of physical activity five or more days per week. Those who met these recommendations were more likely than women who did not to have higher scores on the perceived overall neighborhood safety and satisfaction scale (10.1 vs. 10.0, respectively $P < .02$) and on perceived neighborhood pleasantness (3.5 vs. 3.4, respectively $P < .01$), but scores on perceived neighborhood crime (3.4 for both) and perceived safe neighborhood traffic (3.1 vs. 3.2, respectively) were not significantly different between the two groups.



- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Perceptions of neighborhood characteristics and leisure-time physical inactivity--Austin/Travis County, Texas, 2004. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2005; 54(37):926-928.
- 2 Catlin TK, Simoes EJ, Brownson RC. Environmental and policy factors associated with overweight among adults in Missouri. *Am J Health Promot* 2003; 17(4):249-258.
- 3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; January, 2005.

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