

Grocery boost

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Low-income neighborhoods that lack easy access to grocery stores could lead to a breakdown of food security for hundreds of thousands of people - not in the developing world, but in major urban areas of the U.S. That's the conclusion from a report to be published in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal Behavioural and Healthcare Research* produced by Inderscience Publishers.

Economists Nathan Berg and James Murdoch of the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, at the University of Texas-Dallas, have looked closely at the locations of grocery stores across Dallas County, and have classified neighborhoods according to the number of grocery stores within a one-mile radius. They have correlated this spatial distribution with data from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the US Census to map distinct demographic characteristics in areas with many as opposed to few grocery stores.

"No-grocery-store neighborhoods are predominantly low-income and concentrated in southern Dallas," the researchers say, "and African-American neighborhoods have significantly fewer grocery stores." Many people in more prosperous neighborhoods take for granted that there are local grocery stores that can provide them with a wide variety of nutritious food at relatively low cost. This report offers new evidence that access to reasonably priced, nutritious food is much more difficult than one might hope.

Berg and Murdoch suggest that such disparities in access to nutritious food mean that as many as 400,000 low-income residents of Dallas

County face significant challenges in providing healthy diets to their families, with all the repercussions for health, behavior, and society that entails.

The researchers point out that a similar disparity might be seen across the U.S. And other studies have linked poor access to reasonably priced, nutritious food to greater risks of failing to meet dietary recommendations from mainstream medical and government health organizations.

"New policy approaches are required to bring rapid improvements in food security," the researchers say, suggesting that city leaders should recruit companies to address the problem of under-supplied locations to demonstrate untapped potential for profits and encourage other stores to follow.

"Given the importance of healthy diets, perhaps a rethinking of the institutional framework that determines food supply in the U.S. should be more prominent among issues analyzed in economics and policy-related sciences," the researchers conclude.

Source: Inderscience Publishers

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