

Places to play, but 'stranger danger' fears keep inner-city kids home: Study

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Fear of dangerous strangers in inner-city neighbourhoods is keeping kids and teens from using playgrounds and parks to be physically active.

Researchers in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta, led by Nick Holt, looked at perceived opportunities and barriers to physical activity in an inner-city neighbourhood in Edmonton. They interviewed 59 children and youth, eight school staff and 13 youth workers in adult-supervised physical activity programs about their experiences.

Study data revealed three themes that influenced youngsters' opportunities for physical activity, with positive and negative factors for each.

The first theme identified was "neighbourhood characteristics." On the plus side researchers found neighbourhoods "walkable," with plenty of parks and playgrounds and nearby amenities. However, "stranger danger" fears related to drug users, bullies, prostitutes, gang members and fear of abduction deterred children and youth from visiting these places.

The second theme was "family involvement." Researchers found that while children and youth were rarely allowed out alone, involvement by a family member, for example, accompanying them to a park to play, increased their engagement in physical activity.

The third theme was the "availability of adult-supervised programs." On the positive side, researchers noted the large variety of programs offered by dedicated, hard-working staff and volunteers. Negative factors included minimal resources; staff and volunteer recruitment and retention challenges, and little knowledge of program availability by inner-city children and youth; low adherence to the programs was also a negative factor.

Inner-city neighbourhoods in other metropolitan areas in Canada bear similar characteristics to the one studied and findings can be broadly used to tackle [physical activity](#) barriers for inner-city [children](#) and youth.

More information: The study will appear in December 2009 issue of the international journal *Health and Place*.

Source: University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

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