Engaging Communities to Enhance Physical Activity Among Urban Youth

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Program Abstract
IGNITE, a multiyear, multistate USDA grant-funded project, focused on preventing obesity among youth in limited-income neighborhoods. One focus is to test strategies to help overcome barriers to physical activity. Assessments suggested several barriers to physical activity and provided valuable information for improving adolescent physical activity behavior.

Program Description
As part of a USDA multiyear grant, the Ignite project has used a community-based participatory strategy to help overcome barriers to eating more fruits and vegetables and increasing physical activity and, ultimately, sparking youth to create healthy communities for a lifetime. The project supports teams of community and school partners in limited-income neighborhoods. Obesity is a multifaceted, complex problem, but a sedentary lifestyle is a major contributor to this national health issue. Approximately one third of children nationwide are overweight or obese, and minority children and those with a low socioeconomic status have the highest prevalence rates. Urban youth have been shown to be less physically active than rural youth. Supportive physical activity environments, understood as the geography, observations, and perceptions of features such as recreational facilities, sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic patterns, and so on, have been positively associated with adolescent physical activity behaviors within urban settings. As part of a socio-ecological intervention to improve physical activity behavior, the Physical
Activity Resource Assessment (PARA), the Active Neighborhood Checklist (ANC), and focus groups to assess the physical activity influences within an urban middle school and surrounding community were completed. The assessments suggested that lack of parks, lack of walkability in the streets, perceptions of crime, lack of school programs, and parental and peer influences were all barriers to physical activity opportunities. The ANC, PARA, and focus groups each added valuable information for program planning to improve adolescent physical activity behavior. Extension professionals conducting environmental audits and focus groups, while also working in partnership with a school and community team, can provide a supportive socio-ecological approach to improving physical activity within an urban setting.
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INTRODUCTION
Obesity is a significant public health concern in the United States. In fact, the prevalence of obesity in the United States is approximately 25%. In urban communities, obesity rates are higher among minority populations. Several factors have been identified in the ecological model to influence physical activity (PA) among youth. Examining PA and its determinants from a focus group perspective, we aim to better understand the perceptions of urban youth PA and their socio-environmental contexts. Using a mixed method approach, we examined PA perceptions from youth and adults using physical activity resource assessments (PARA) and focus groups.

METHODS
The target community was a low-income, urban Junior High School and surrounding community, 20,000 residents within a mid-sized Midwestern City (pop. 65,000). Nearly all students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. School enrollment consisted of 175 students, predominantly African American, 72% female, 10% Hispanic, 14% Caucasian, 20% Caucasian.

RESULTS
Physical Activity Environmental Assessments:
The Physical Activity Resource Assessments suggested the surrounding community was not conducive to youth PA. The school has 3 parks designated for PA, but only 2 were delineated for audit with the PARA. The park had 3 out of 7 facilities in a comparable type of PA. The path was 1500 feet away, but this was not walkable, due to a 57% gradient. One mile radius of the school had an average very low in terms of walkability as determined by the PARA.

Barriers to Youth PA
Intrapersonal: Students reported physical limitations (e.g., asthma, back pain) and lack of sports participation. Students reported feeling unsafe in the surrounding neighborhood. Low access to PA was found for audit with the PARA. The park had 3 out of 7 facilities in a comparable type of PA. The path was 1500 feet away, but this was not walkable. However, this could be very costly. Addressing crime or perceptions of safety might be an important focus for enhancing community and encouraging PA. AQA provides research and related educational programs to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information:

REFERENCES

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS
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CONCLUSIONS
Physical Activity Resource Assessments suggested that PA demands determined low access to PA, crime was the major concern (e.g., for walkability). The school and community included a low access to PA, crime was the major concern (e.g., for walkability). However, this could be very costly. Improving parks and sidewalks might be an important focuses for enhancing community and encouraging PA. Enhancing community and improving parks and sidewalks might be an important focus for enhancing community and encouraging PA.

Figure 1. Perceptions of Physical Activity: Focus Group Subthemes

Table 1. Demographics of Adult Focus Groups

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Table 2. Demographics of Youth Focus Groups

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