

Engaging Communities to Enhance Physical Activity Among Urban Youth

Susan Zies, Dan Remley, Beth Stefura,
Marcia Jess, and Shannon Smith
Ohio State University

Tandalayo Kidd, Erika Lindshield,
and Nancy Muturi
Kansas State University

Kendra Kattelman
South Dakota State University

Koushik Adhikari
University of Georgia

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.

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

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¹Susan Zies, M.Ed.; ²Dan Remley, MSPH, PhD; ³Tandilayo Kidd, PhD, RD, LD, LPN; ⁴Nancy Muturi, PhD; ⁵Kendra Kattelmann, PhD; ⁶RDN, LN; ⁷Erika Lindshield, MPH, RD, LD; ⁸Koushik Adhikari, PhD; ⁹Beth Stefura, MEd, RD, LD; ¹⁰Marcia Jess, MAHE; ¹¹Shannon Smith, MEd, RD, LD

INTRODUCTION
 Physical inactivity is a leading concern in the United States. In 2012, more than one-third of U.S. children and adolescents were physically inactive. Physical inactivity is a major contributor to chronic disease, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Physical activity is more beneficial for children and adolescents than any other lifestyle factor. Barriers to physical activity include lack of time, lack of resources, and lack of safe places to be active. School-based interventions to promote physical activity have been shown to be effective. This study was part of a larger project, the Neighborhood Coalitions (ANC), and focus groups were used to understand barriers to physical activity among urban middle school and surrounding community.

OBJECTIVE
 The purpose of this study was to identify barriers to physical activity among middle school students and surrounding community. The study was part of a larger project, the Neighborhood Coalitions (ANC), and focus groups were used to understand barriers to physical activity among urban middle school and surrounding community.

METHODS
 The target community was a low-income, urban, junior-high school in a medium size Midwestern city (pop. 65,000). Nearly all students were African American. The study was part of a larger project, the Neighborhood Coalitions (ANC), and focus groups were used to understand barriers to physical activity among urban middle school and surrounding community.

Measuring Environmental Support
 The study was part of a larger project, the Neighborhood Coalitions (ANC), and focus groups were used to understand barriers to physical activity among urban middle school and surrounding community.

Measuring Perceptions of PA
 The study was part of a larger project, the Neighborhood Coalitions (ANC), and focus groups were used to understand barriers to physical activity among urban middle school and surrounding community.



Table 1. Demographics of Adult Focus Groups

Focus Group (FG)	Gender	Ethnicity	#
FG 1 – Teachers	80% Female	40% African American	5
FG 2 – Parents	75% Female	75% African American	4
FG 3 – Parents	Female	78% Hispanic 14% Hispanic 8% Caucasian	13

Table 2. Demographics of Youth Focus Groups

Focus Group (FG)	Gender	Ethnicity	#
FG 1	60% Female	90% African American	10
FG 2	100% Female	80% African American	5
FG 3	100% Female	100% African American	4

RESULTS

The environmental assessment, designed to assess the surrounding area to be used for a pilot PA program, identified several barriers to physical activity. These included lack of safe places to be active, lack of resources, and lack of time. The assessment also identified several opportunities for physical activity, including the use of existing facilities, such as the school playground, and the use of existing resources, such as the school playground.



Figure 1. Perceptions of Physical Activity



CONCLUSIONS

The environmental assessment identified several barriers to physical activity, including lack of safe places to be active, lack of resources, and lack of time. The assessment also identified several opportunities for physical activity, including the use of existing facilities, such as the school playground, and the use of existing resources, such as the school playground.



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