

Built environment, active transportation, and childhood overweight: an exploration analysis

Jianling Li

University of Texas, Arlington

P. O. Box 19588

Arlington, TX 76019

817-272-3367,

jjli@uta.eedu

The prevalence of overweight and obesity continues to challenge public health professionals and planners in the United States (US). During 2009–2010, more than a third of adults and nearly one of five youths aged 2–19 years was obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The problem is more profound in socioeconomically disadvantage groups. The prevalence of overweight and obesity is an important issue as obesity is one of the leading causes of death and disability and the cost of treatment has climbed over the years in the U.S.

The lack of physical activities is considered as one of the important factors contributing to obesity and other chronic diseases. The public health and planning literature suggests that the built environment may play a significant role in health outcomes. Land use and transportation planners have long advocated smart growth solutions such as transit-oriented development and changes in the design of the built environment to promote sustainable development and active transportation. Despite the recent efforts on promoting physical activities through change in design of the built environment, more empirical studies are needed to demonstrate the linkage between built environment, active transportation, and health benefits, especially the health benefit of children.

Using the 2008 Cook Children's Community Needs Assessment Survey (CCHAPS) data in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and GIS and statistical analysis techniques, this study investigates the complex relationship among built environment, childhood overweight, and other socioeconomic and behavior factors. Preliminary



analysis indicates some correlation between childhood overweight and some built environment and socioeconomic factors. Further analysis will provide some insights into the issue. Implications for planning will be discussed.