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Brief report

Critical Factors for Active Transportation to School Among Low-Income and Minority Students: Evidence from the 2001 National Household Travel Survey

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Background

Walking to school may be an important source of daily physical activity in children's lives, and government agencies are supporting programs to encourage walking to school (e.g., Safe Routes to School and the CDC's KidsWalk programs). However, little research has looked at differences in behavior across racial/ethnic and income groups.

Methods

This cross-sectional study used data from the 2001 National Household Travel Survey to document rates of walking and biking to school among low-income and minority

youth in the U.S. (N=14,553). Binary models of the decision to use active transport to school were developed to simultaneously adjust for trip, individual, household, and neighborhood correlates. All analyses were conducted in 2007.

Results

The data showed that low-income and minority groups, particularly blacks and Hispanics, use active travel modes to get to school at much higher rates than whites or higher-income students. However, racial variation in travel patterns is removed by controlling for household income, vehicle access, distance between home and school, and residential density.

Conclusions

Active transportation to school may be an important strategy to increase and maintain physical activity levels for low-income and minority youth. Current policy interventions such as Safe Routes to School have the opportunity to provide benefits for low-income and minority students who are the most likely to walk to school.



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