Associations of Neighborhood Safety and Collective Efficacy with Dietary Intake among Preschool-Aged Children and Mothers

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Positive neighborhood environments may promote healthier behaviors, yet few studies have examined associations between neighborhood social environment and diet. We examined associations of neighborhood perceived safety, collective efficacy, and violent crime with dietary intake among preschool-aged children and their mothers. We administered a cross-sectional survey to 300 mothers/female caregivers of Medicaid-enrolled 2- to 4-year-old children in Philadelphia. Mothers reported their own and their child's dietary intake using the validated Dietary Screener Questionnaire. Mixed-effects linear regression models assessed associations of perceived neighborhood safety, collective efficacy, and census tract-level violent crime with parent and child dietary intake, adjusted for individual, family, and neighborhood covariates. Among mothers, higher perceived neighborhood safety and collective efficacy were associated with higher daily intake of fruits/vegetables (? = 0.35 cups, 95% CI: 0.12-0.58 and ? = 0.30 cups, 95% CI: 0.08-0.52, comparing the highest with lowest tertile). Higher neighborhood-perceived safety was also associated with higher whole-grain intake among mothers (? = 0.14 ounces, 95% CI: 0.02-0.27) and children (? = 0.07 ounces, 95% CI: 0.01-0.13, comparing the highest with lowest tertile). Neighborhood social exposures were not associated with intake of added sugars or sugar-sweetened beverages for mothers or children, nor were lower levels of violent crime associated with any outcome. More favorable perceptions of neighborhood safety and collective efficacy were associated with a slightly higher consumption of some healthy foods among mothers and their young children. Future prospective research is needed to confirm these findings, explore potential mechanisms, and determine wh

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