

226 EQUITY, POLICY AND CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

We aim to provide fine-grained, contextual and experiential information about how children experience and understand social and geographical environments in relation to their physical activity choices. . We used a qualitative approach, informed by the interpretive paradigm, the 'new sociology of childhood' and the 'critical social geographies of childhood.' We sampled over 400 children, 3 to 13 years, from schools and pre-schools in metropolitan, rural and remote South Australia because patterns of physical activity and overweight in children vary by class and area: including between metropolitan and rural areas and within rural areas. Qualitative techniques were focus groups, drawing/mapping and photovoice. We collected data in schools over two days, returned for a day to conduct workshops with children and their photographs, then returned for feedback and to discuss emerging results with children, parents and teachers. In focus groups we asked what their area was like for a child, places they were allowed to go and any boundaries on their movements imposed by their families. Maps showed how they used and perceived distance and photovoice showed why places were important. Many rural children used more space around homes and in multiple neighbourhoods. Closer analysis showed use of space needed an elaborate system of school buses, sporting and social clubs and adults (predominantly parents) devoting time and logistics to transport children. This in turn is related to public infrastructure and private wealth, control over life and social capital building blocks of trust and reciprocity. Metropolitan children reported smaller, stricter boundaries, constructed from natural and built environmental features and notions of safety and supervision. They were not as happy as rural children about their boundaries. Metropolitan children were more sensitive to danger from motor vehicles and crime. We illustrate pathways between physical activity and area level characteristics sensitive to social class: such as safer co-existence between cars and children and areas with lower fear of crime - both of which are influenced by social class expressed in urban design. Recent attempts to increase physical activity and reduce overweight in children demonstrate little understanding of the sociology of children or of children as active social agents. Our work aims to influence public policy by using children's experiences to show specific pathways whereby physical activity is directly influenced by universal policies to improve transport, allow children and motor vehicles to co-exist more safely, reduce fear of and exposure to crime and build social capital.