



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Tackling obesity: where you live can make a fat difference

A comparison of 60 urban neighbourhoods has found that both the level of household income and, separately, the density of residential housing, has a close association with people's physical activity levels and risk of having excess bodyweight, according to research published today in BMJ Open. The neighbourhoods were chosen in Belgium, France, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Hungary, and residents living in these neighbourhoods were asked about their general activity levels, sedentary behaviour, diet and health.

The researchers, a team involving 13 institutions across eight countries, found that the residential density had a significant impact on physical activity levels, with people in lower density neighbourhoods tending to get less activity than people in higher density neighbourhoods.

The research team also found that residents in lower income neighbourhoods ate less fruit and vegetables, drank more sugary drinks, and had a higher body mass.

The researchers examined the neighbourhoods using geographic data from the European Environmental Agency based on high-resolution satellite photographs. Data on average household incomes were provided by national census and government statistical offices.

"New tools for analysing local neighbourhoods are helping researchers show how the place where you live may be having a bigger impact on your risk of obesity than you think," said Dr Jeroen Lakerveld, author of the report and coordinator of the SPOTLIGHT project at the VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam.

“We are only just beginning to explore the possibilities of using geographic data linked to healthy behaviours and health outcomes,” he added. Other tools for studying the environment, such as Google Street View, can give us very fine details of neighbourhoods, and help us understand why some locations seem to be particularly likely to increase the risk of health problems such as diseases associated with obesity.”

The full paper is available here: <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/10/e008505.full>

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SPOTLIGHT website: www.spotlight-project.eu

SPOTLIGHT stands for *sustainable prevention of obesity through integrated strategies*. The SPOTLIGHT project is a cross-European research project in eight EU member states. Partners in the research consortium include

- VU University Medical Center (The Netherlands)
- The University of Lisbon (Portugal)
- The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (United Kingdom)
- The European Association for the Study of Obesity
- The University of Bergen (Norway)
- The University of Oxford (United Kingdom)
- Ghent University (Belgium)
- Metropolitan University College Copenhagen (Denmark)
- Maastricht University (The Netherlands)
- The Nutrition Epidemiology Unit (France)
- University of Debrecen (Hungary)
- Blox Group (The Netherlands)
- The World Obesity Federation

The World Obesity Federation is the new name for the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO) and International Obesity TaskForce (IOTF). We represent professional members of the scientific, medical and research communities from over 50 regional and national obesity associations. Through this global community we work to alert the world to the growing crisis caused by soaring levels of obesity and to drive global efforts to reduce, prevent and treat obesity. Details at www.worldobesity.org.



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