Obesity Rate Is Lower Among Black Girls With Asthma in Underprivileged Areas

Teen females with asthma in poor neighborhoods are more likely to get better medical care than those diagnosed only as obese.

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Asthma and obesity are two health conditions that disproportionately affect Black youth. But the first condition may protect young Black females living in disadvantaged neighborhoods from the latter, according to new findings published in Obesity Science & Practice, reports LSU Health New Orleans.

In the first study of its kind, researchers evaluated the body mass index, or BMI (a ratio of height to weight), and asthma status of 129 African-American girls between ages 13 and 19. Then, scientists used the concentrated disadvantage index (CDI)—a measure of socioeconomic status—to determine the level of poverty in these teens' neighborhoods.

Predictably, results showed that the adolescent girls who lived in more disadvantaged neighborhoods had higher BMIs. But to their surprise, researchers found that CDI and obesity were not significantly linked in those with asthma.

Scientists attributed the association between CDI and obesity to a lack of green space to exercise in underprivileged neighborhoods, girls' fears of crime limiting their exercise habits and the reduced access to health care.

"If you have a special condition that is medically diagnosed, like asthma, you may be able to access better health care," said Melina Sothern, PhD, professor and Jim Finks Endowed Chair in Health Promotion at LSU Health New Orleans School of Public Health. "But if your only diagnosis is obesity, medical professionals trained in this area may not be able to help you address this health problem if you live in a disadvantaged neighborhood."

However, access doesn't always ensure good medical care. Because of weight bias and stigma associated with obesity, health care can be drastically different for a child with asthma versus a child receiving obesity counseling.

Investigators concluded that these findings can drive the development of asthma care programs targeted to improve prevention, screening and treatment for kids living in underprivileged communities.

For similar coverage, read “Black Teens Experience Reduced Asthma Symptoms With Community-Based Treatment.”

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