

What Brings Children to the Park?

Analysis and Measurement of the Variables Affecting Children's Use of Parks

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Summary

The neighborhood park, located in walking distance from residences seems to be the ideal setting for participation in active recreation and physical activity. Yet, researchers find parks to be often underutilized and attracting only a sub-segment of neighborhood children. This study seeks to understand the attributes and incentives that bring children to parks and how these may vary because of different socio-demographic and cultural characteristics of children. More specifically, the study will examine three classes of variables, the combined influence of which may affect participation and type of use of neighborhood parks: 1) neighborhood-level variables, 2) park-level variables, and 3) user-level variables. The study will apply both quantitative and qualitative methods to empirically study neighborhood parks in the city of Los Angeles and will comprise of two phases. The first phase will collect quantitative and objective data and will use spatial analysis to identify the neighborhood, park, and children-user characteristics in two regions of metropolitan Los Angeles – the Valley and the Inner City. Statistical analysis will assess the relationships between the collected data and park use by children. During the second phase, a survey of children and

their parents distributed to middle schools in close proximity to the parks will seek to identify the more subjective and perceptual influences that may impact park use and will yield qualitative information regarding the frequency and duration of visits, elements of attraction to the park, level of satisfaction, type of activities performed, perception of safety, likes and dislikes about the park and its facilities. The latter survey will reach both users and non-users of parks.

With the rising epidemic of child obesity, public health professionals are stressing the significance of parks as settings for physical activity for children and adults. By better understanding the incentives and variables that attract children to the parks we can increase youth participation in parks. To this end the study will offer a series of recommendations for the planning, design, and programming of parks so that they can attract more children users.