

Investigating associations of physical activity, environmental features and social interaction with mental health in an urban environment.

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Introduction

Living in urban environments is associated with higher levels of loneliness and inactivity, which are detrimental to mental and physical health (WHO, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to identify factors that counteract these health decreasing characteristics. In this regard, there is convincing evidence that social interaction, e.g., pursuing social activities, is related to better mental health (Schwanen & Wang, 2014). However, studies addressing factors that predict social activities in urban environments are lacking, especially as existing studies mostly focus on older age populations. Hence, this study aims to examine the simultaneous impact of residential environment features (REF) and physically active mobility (PAM) on social activities in mid-aged adults living in an urban area.

Method

Cross-sectional data regarding PAM (walking to work, running errands by foot, bicycling to work, general bicycling, and strolling), social activities (i.e., frequencies or pursuing social activities, e.g., meeting friends/family, going to a bar/restaurant, etc.), REF (shortened NEWS-I, i.e., satisfaction with the living environment, e.g., available amenities, etc.), and Multidimensional Mood State Questionnaire (MDMQ) were collected from adults in several preselected residential areas in Stuttgart, Germany via an online questionnaire. JASP was used for a regression analysis to predict social activities from REF and PAM, and mental health from social activities.

Results

Data of 246 individuals (47% female, $M_{age} = 46.19$, $SD_{age} = 16.42$) were included in the analysis. Satisfaction with REF [$b = 3.28$, $t(209) = 3.11$, $p = .002$] and PAM [$b = 3.03$, $t(209) = 2.95$, $p = .003$] both positively and significantly predicted social activities, ($F(2,209) = 10.981$, $p < .001$) accounting for 8.6% of the explained variability. In addition, social activities positively predicted mental health [$b = 0.09$, $t(222) = 2.22$, $p = .027$], ($F(1,222) = 4.942$, $p = .027$, $R^2 = .017$).

Discussion

Results indicate that pursuing social activities is associated with the perception of physical environmental features of the living area and the amount of walking / bicycling in the residential environment. Gaining knowledge about the dependencies of social activities and mental health help to create health-enhancing urban areas.

References

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