



PATREC

2nd PATREC Research Forum
19 September 2006

Abstract Template

Paper title: Perceptions of safety in suburban neighbourhoods: exploring the moderating influence of the physical environment.

Author(s) name(s): Sarah Foster, Prof Billie Giles-Corti and Prof Matthew Knuiman

Organisation(s): School of Population Health
University of Western Australia

Contact details: Sarah Foster
Mailing address: School of Population Health M431
The University of Western Australia
35 Stirling Highway
CRAWLEY WA 6009

Telephone: 6488 8730
Facsimile: 6488 1188
Email: sfoster@sph.uwa.edu.au

Abstract (300 words maximum):

Among public health practitioners, there is growing recognition of the need to build supportive environments that encourage people to be physically active. One necessary component of a supportive environment is neighbourhood safety. While we intuitively expect that neighbourhoods perceived to be unsafe will constrain local physical activity and affect health, the evidence of such a link is inconclusive.

This paper presents a theoretical model investigating the relationships between the physical environment, perceived neighbourhood safety and local walking. The central theme is the moderating influence that urban design and neighbourhood presentation have on resident perceptions. The model will be applied to investigate whether neighbourhoods designed to promote safety through activity and surveillance (i.e. Liveable Neighbourhoods) improve residents' feelings of safety, and consequently affect walking behaviour.

The Safety and Walking Study is part of the RESIDENTIAL Environment project (RESIDE), a longitudinal study of people building homes in new housing estates designed to examine the impact of urban design on walking, cycling, and sense of community. RESIDE will evaluate the impact of Liveable Neighbourhood sub-division design codes that aim to increase walking. The Safety and Walking Study will combine survey data and objective environmental assessments to offer insights into which, if any, aspects of suburban design correlate with increased perceived safety among residents.

The Safety and Walking Study is funded by the Australian Research Council, with The Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) as industry partner.