Women’s perceptions of neighborhood resources and hazards related to diet, physical activity, and smoking: focus group results from economically distinct neighborhoods in a mid-sized US city

*Am J Health Promotion*, in press 2007

**Abstract**

*Purpose:* To investigate women’s perceptions of neighborhood resources and hazards associated with poor diet, physical inactivity, and cigarette smoking.

*Design.* After interviewing city officials and visual assessments, three economically distinct neighborhoods in a mid-sized city were selected.

*Setting.* Salinas, California, a predominantly Latino city.

*Method.* Eight focus groups, conducted in Spanish or English in the three neighborhoods. Thematic coding of focus group transcripts identified key concepts. Women also mapped their perceived neighborhood boundaries.

*Participants.* Women who had at least one child under age 18 living with them.

*Results.* Women identified food stores, parks, recreation areas, and schools as key resources in their neighborhoods. They identified fast food restaurants, convenience stores, violent crime, gangs, and drug-associated issues as “hazards.” Distinctions between resources and hazards were not always clear-cut. For example, parks were sometimes considered dangerous; fast food restaurants were sometimes considered a convenient and inexpensive way to feed one’s family. Women’s perceptions of their neighborhood boundaries differed greatly by type of neighborhood – the perceived neighborhood area (in acres) drawn by women in the lower income neighborhood was ¼ the size of the area drawn by women in the higher income neighborhood.

*Conclusion.* This qualitative, exploratory study illustrates how resources and hazards in one’s neighborhood cannot be viewed as having solely one dimension — each may influence health behaviors both positively and negatively.

Irene H. Yen, Ph.D.
Department of Medicine
University of California, San Francisco
Phone: (415) 502 7046
Email: Irene.Yen@ucsf.edu

Teresa Scherzer, Ph.D.
Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences
University of California, San Francisco
Phone: (415) 476-0993
Email: teresa.scherzer@ucsf.edu

Catherine Cubbin, Ph.D.
Department of Family and Community Medicine
University of California, San Francisco
Population Research Center
University of Texas at Austin
Phone: (512) 391 0391
Email: cubbinc@fcm.ucsf.edu

Alma Gonzalez, M.P.H.
Stanford Prevention Research Center
Stanford University
Phone: (650) 725-4824
Alma.Gonzalez@stanford.edu

Marilyn A. Winkleby, Ph.D., MPH
Stanford Prevention Research Center
Stanford University
Phone: (650) 723-7055
Email: winkleby@stanford.edu