Healthy urban environments for children and young people: A systematic review of intervention studies

People and governments are increasingly acknowledging the need to build ‘healthy communities.’ Concern is growing regarding the lifestyle adopted by some people including poor diet quality and increased sedentary behaviours. Given children’s lack of power to change the environment in which they live in, they are seen as particularly vulnerable. This systematic review aimed to examine the evidence from intervention studies focused on modifying the urban environment and reported specific health outcomes for children and young people.

A total of 33 relevant primary studies were included, the majority of which were based on interventions implemented in the USA. Specifically, seven USA-based studies in relation to four multi-component community-based environmental change interventions were included. One of them, ‘Shape Up Somerville’ highlighted a decrease in BMI z-score both at the one-year and two-year follow-up time points. Consequently, while a series of limitations were identified, there seems to be some evidence pointing towards the effectiveness of multi-component interventions related to obesity prevention health initiatives.