

ABSTRACT

Disparities in food access to different types of food stores are a key factor in assessing the health of food environments. The spatial accessibility of food (hereinafter “food access”) refers to the physical distance between food stores and the neighborhoods they service (Sharkey and Horel 2008; Larson et al. 2009). Nationwide studies of metropolitan and urban areas have shown that low socioeconomic areas have fewer supermarkets and more convenience stores than high socioeconomic areas (Morris et al. 1990; Cotterill and Franklin 1995). However, some more recent studies of localized areas have found no evidence of a relationship between food access and socioeconomic conditions (Alviola et al. 2013). Still others have found that deprived minority neighborhoods exhibit better food access than wealthier areas (Sharkey and Horel 2008). Gaps exist in the literature for food access analyses at the local scale. The Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA MSA is one such region lacking an empirical analysis of food access at the neighborhood scale. To investigate the relationship between food access and neighborhood characteristics, this study measures road network distance of neighborhoods, defined as the population weighted centroid of Census Block Groups, to different types of food stores (chain supermarkets, small grocery stores, convenient stores, and fast food restaurants) throughout the 2010 Atlanta MSA. The primary conclusion of this study is that food access to all food store types in the Atlanta MSA is highest among high minority and low income neighborhoods. This may speak more broadly to the differences in food access between urban and rural areas as the majority of all types of food businesses are located in the densely populated areas surrounding the city center of Atlanta. Future research should investigate how urban, rural, and suburban neighborhood types shape food access in the Atlanta MSA.