

# ACTIVE TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN OTAGO: PERSONAL AND FAMILY PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

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**Background** With increasing prevalence of sedentary lifestyle and less time dedicated to physical education and free play in youth, there is a greater need to promote other opportunities for physical activity, such as active transport (AT).

**Aims** This study examines individual and school-related factors associated with AT—walking and cycling—to school among adolescents in Otago, New Zealand.

**Methods** In 2009, a total of 1726 secondary school students (age:  $15.1 \pm 1.1$  years; 68.5% urban; 51.6% boys) from 19 of 23 schools in the Otago Region completed the online Otago School Students Lifestyle Survey. Data collected included usual mode of transport to school, sociodemographic and behavioural information, social support for AT, and personal and family perceptions of safety when using AT.

**Results** Overall, 36.6% of secondary students used AT and 63.4% used motorised transport (MT) to school. Boys were more likely than girls to use AT to get to school (39.3% boys vs 33.8% girls,  $p=0.024$ ). Regional status was also a predictor of AT to school (46.1% rural vs 32.2% urban students,  $p<0.001$ ). Overall, 63.7% of students believed taking a bus was safer than walking or cycling (61.0% AT vs 64.6% MT,  $p=0.244$ ). Other factors influencing transport choices to school were parental perceptions of safety (91.5% AT vs 84.3% MT,  $p<0.001$ ) and encouragement from friends (47.9% AT vs 21.3% MT,  $p<0.001$ ).

**Significance** Boys and rural students are more likely to use AT to school. The greatest barriers to AT were safety concerns and lack of peer support.