

Building an Inclusive Policy and Research Agenda

Paper prepared for:

What Do We Know and Where Do We Go?

Conference sponsored by the Canadian Council on Social Development and Human Resources Development Canada, Ottawa, ONT, March 27 and 28, 2003

Prepared by:

Margaret K. Dechman

Principal Investigator, Family Mosaic Project

The Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources Development Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services are pleased to have provided financial support and consultation to this project.

This document expresses the views and opinions of the author and does not necessarily represent the official policy or opinion of Human Resources Development Canada, the Government of Canada, the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, or the Nova Scotia Government.

The two primary objectives of this paper are:

- ◆ to describe the processes through which social exclusion occurs,
- ◆ to provide direction for future research, policy, and program development aimed at promoting a more inclusive world.

The first section “What do We Know?” provides data on the many forms social exclusion can assume in our homes, schools, and communities. The second section “Where Do We Go?” offers three directions for future work:

- ◆ to seek a better understanding of the conditions that serve to strengthen or undermine relationships in families, schools, and communities,
- ◆ to move beyond program evaluation to explore more comprehensive research and planning strategies,
- ◆ to identify opportunities for mutually-reinforcing, inclusive approaches to social policy development.

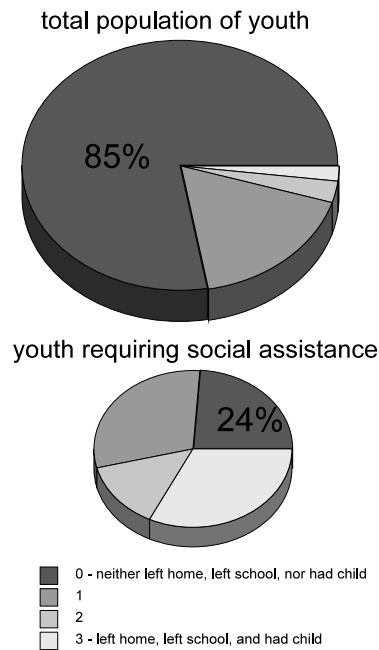
What Do We Know?

One of the most striking findings of longitudinal research is that manifestations of exclusion, such as situationally-induced mental health problems, conflict with the law, or long-term unemployment, rarely occur as random events (Williamson, 1997; Dechman, 2001). Rather, the generation of such outcomes can be traced through prolonged and pervasive difficulties that begin early in life and compound over time.

When examining the childhoods of those who end up outside the parameters of social, economic, and civic activities, one can discern many broken relationships along the way (Williamson, 1997; Dechman, 2001). Starting early in life, a child can be included within or excluded from their family. As they grow older, they can be included within or excluded from peer groups, the school system, their neighbourhood, the labour market, or society in general. What is more, those who experience exclusion in one area are at increased risk of experiencing exclusion in other areas as well. By the time they have become excluded from the labour force or society in general, through prolonged unemployment or incarceration, people typically carry the scars of previous exclusion.

An examination of the lives of long-term social assistance recipients provides a striking illustration of how the process of social exclusion unfolds. Single parents represent a growing proportion of those who require continuing income support in Nova Scotia, across Canada, and in many other parts of the world (National Council of Welfare, 1998). A profile of young social assistance recipients reveals three distinctive characteristics: having become separated from their parental home before 18 years of age, having left the school system before completing grade 12, and having a dependent child. Three-quarters of young social assistance clients fit at least one of these characteristics and half fit two or more (Dechman, 2001). The immediate assumption is that these are young mothers who dropped out of school because of pregnancy or the responsibilities of parenting. However, two-thirds of the single mothers from the Family Mosaic Project (FMP)¹ who had a baby before completing grade 12 had left the school system prior to becoming pregnant. Teen child bearing is more commonly an outcome, rather than a cause, of problems at home, at school, or in the community (Phoenix, 1991; Upchurch and McCarthy, 1990; Dechman, 2002). Because adult exclusion in the form of long-term social assistance requirements often arises out of childhood exclusion from family and school, it is impossible to assist clients in securing employment without first addressing more fundamental needs for upgrading and social support. Employability initiatives are complicated by requirements for upgrading or even basic literacy training, an absence of family backup in the case of illness or emergency, and in some cases a lack of confidence or social skills. There are also hidden barriers such as the fear of leaving children with strangers characteristic of mothers who have experienced the terror of violence or abuse.

Percentage of NS 20-year-old youth having left home, left school, and/or had a child



Those who work within Social Services, Mental Health, or Corrections quickly realize that the reintegration of their clients is complicated not only by their immediate situation

but also by the multitude of difficulties that have preceded this outcome (MacDonald, 1997). Because long-term social assistance clients or those in conflict with the law face such entrenched difficulties, some have come to view supportive programming as either too costly or simply hopeless (Murray, 1990, 1995; Mead, 1996). This, however, is a short-sighted reaction. Not only are socially-excluded individuals likely to present continuing problems throughout their own lives, as evidenced by the many forms of recidivism, but also these unresolved difficulties are likely to filter down to their children.

While redressing the long-term manifestations of social exclusion may seem overwhelming, curtailing exclusion in the beginning stages appears more promising. If exclusion is a compounding process, the sooner this process is diverted in a more inclusive direction, the fewer obstacles there will be to overcome.

Results from a twenty-year longitudinal study of Nova Scotia families demonstrates how the web of social and economic exclusion expands over time.¹ Mothers who start parenting with low levels of education are more likely to be single parents than are mothers who start parenting with higher levels of education (Dechman, 2001). This combination of lone-parenting and low education almost inevitably leads to poverty and requirements for social assistance. Educational and earnings deficits in turn foster exclusion from community and school activities. Lone parent, low educated, and/or poor mothers find it difficult to get involved in volunteer or supportive activities either at their children's schools or in their communities due to transportation, time, child care, confidence, and other restrictions.

Compounding exclusionary experiences affect not only the lives of mothers themselves but the lives of their children. The reality is that parents are the first and primary socialization agents for most children. If parents themselves have been excluded from mainstream education and employment systems, it is difficult for them to help their children "fit it". While it is possible for children from advantaged homes to enter a cycle of exclusion, this cycle is more common among marginalized families. Financial and social deficits often occur in tandem producing multiple difficulties for parents and children alike.

One of the most severe manifestations of social exclusion among children and youth is the development of problems in the school system. While we tend to think of early

school leaving as the product of cognitive deficits, it more typically arises from the compounding forces of economic and social exclusion.

When the children involved in the FMP were ten years of age, they were administered the WISC-R achievement assessment (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children - Revised). This assessment included two principal components: performance and verbal.

The Verbal Scale is dependent on the child's accumulated experience. It usually requires the child to give a response that is in his or her repertoire. The questions are presented verbally, and the responses are given orally. The Verbal Scale might be considered to be an index of verbal ability and crystallized intelligence.

The Performance Scale, in contrast, is more dependent on the child's immediate problem-solving ability. It requires the child to meet new situations and apply past experience and previously acquired skills to a new set of demands. The stimuli are nonverbal, and most are presented visually. Solutions require motor responses and, to a lesser extent, verbal responses. The Performance Scale might be considered to be an index of nonverbal ability and fluid intelligence.

Fluid intelligence refers to essentially nonverbal, relatively culture-free mental efficiency, whereas crystallized intelligence refers to acquired skills and knowledge that are strongly dependent for their development on exposure to culture (Sattler, 1988).

The verbal component of IQ (Intelligence Quotient), which is most affected by family conditions, has a stronger association with early school leaving than does the performance component of IQ (Dechman, 2002). Furthermore, even at the bivariate level, there are many contextual factors that exhibit stronger associations with early school leaving than either of these components of IQ, such as:

- ◆ the mother's level of education,
- ◆ the relative stability of the family unit,
- ◆ the percentage of time spent in a two-parent family, and
- ◆ the quality and stability of housing (Dechman, 2002).

Whereas approximately one out of four of the youth from the FMP who left school before completing grade 12 had scored below average on their IQ assessment administered at ten years of age, what was more characteristic of early school leavers was a progression of compounding difficulties at home and at school.

The home environments of school leavers were marked by early and continuing signs of exclusion and disruption.

- ◆ 37 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 7 percent of high school graduates had mothers who started parenting with grade 9 or less education.²
- ◆ 57 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 18 percent of high school graduates had experienced two or more changes in their family composition before eighteen years of age.
- ◆ 51 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 18 percent of high school graduates spent less than half of their formative years in a two-parent family.
- ◆ 56 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 16 percent of high school graduates had changed their place of residence five or more times before they reached 18 years of age.
- ◆ 49 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 23 percent of high school graduates had lived below the poverty line at some time.
- ◆ 42 percent of the mothers of early school leavers in comparison to 12 percent of the mothers of high school graduates indicated they had lived in unacceptable housing.
- ◆ 31 percent of the mothers of early school leavers in comparison to 13 percent of the mothers of high school graduates reported very low levels of support for child rearing.

What is particularly distinctive about those who drop out of school is not just the presence of what is considered to be a 'risk' factor but rather the additive nature of such conditions. As described earlier in this report, issues related to education, family structure, residential mobility, income, and child-rearing support are all interconnected.

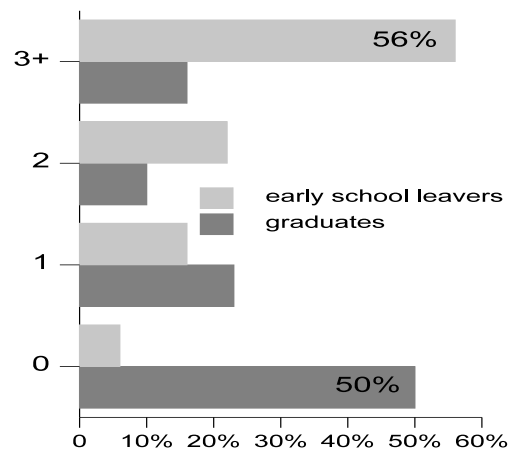
It is the combination of these multiple forms of economic and social marginalization that has the most profound effect on outcomes for youth.

- ◆ Only 1 out of 100 youth who experienced none of the above family characteristics left the school system before completing grade 12.
- ◆ 1 out of 10 of those who experienced one,
- ◆ 1 out of 4 of those who experienced two, and
- ◆ 1 out of 3 of those who experienced three or more of the above conditions left school before grade 12.

Consequently the profiles of early school leavers look strikingly different than the profiles of graduates.

Total number of predispositional factors among early school leavers and high school graduates

- ◆ mother grade 9 or less
- ◆ two or more changes in family composition
- ◆ lived in two-parent family less than half of life
- ◆ moved 5 or more times
- ◆ lived below the poverty line at some time
- ◆ had unacceptable housing
- ◆ mother had little support for child rearing



Fifty-six percent of youth who left the school system before completing grade 12 in comparison to only 16 percent of graduates had experienced 3 or more of the listed predispositional factors. Conversely, 50 percent of high school graduates in comparison to 6 percent of early school leavers had experienced none of the predispositional factors.

Most early school leavers also had experienced problems at school long before they dropped out.

- ◆ At ten years of age, 48 percent of students who eventually dropped out, in comparison to 20 percent of those who went on to graduate, were given below average performance ratings by their teachers.
- ◆ At this age, 55 percent of those who became early school leavers, in comparison to 17 percent of those who went on to complete grade 12, were described by their teachers as exhibiting behavioural problems.
- ◆ 77 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 19 percent of high school graduates had repeated a grade at some time.

Whereas only approximately one-quarter of early school leavers had exhibited below average IQ assessments, approximately half were rated by teachers as exhibiting performance problems at ten years of age and three-quarters repeated a grade at some time. Even when controlling for cognitive ability, grade repetition is a significant indicator of what lies ahead. When selecting only respondents who scored in the average or above IQ range, and hence exhibited no cognitive impediment to completing grade 12, students who repeated a grade were ten times more likely to drop out than were students who had not repeated a grade (Dechman, 2002).

By the time they reached their teens, many school leavers were experiencing estrangement both at school and at home.

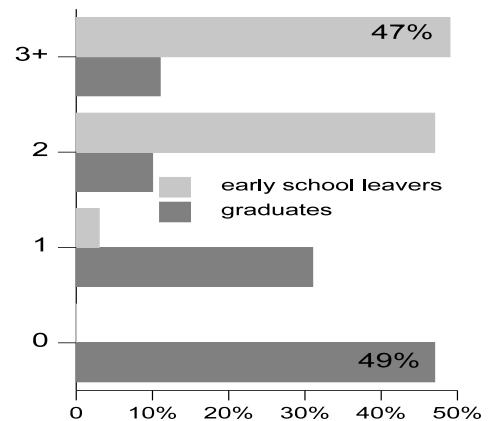
- ◆ 45 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 14 percent of graduates felt teachers did not think they would do well in life.
- ◆ 40 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 13 percent of graduates felt teachers did not encourage students to express their opinions.
- ◆ 38 percent of early school leavers in comparison to 25 percent of graduates sometimes did not feel safe at school.

- ◆ 67 percent of the mothers of early school leavers in comparison to 22 percent of the mothers of high school graduates considered their son/daughter a very difficult teen.

Once again it is the covariance of these factors that is particularly distinctive of early school leavers.

Total number of predispositional factors among early school leavers and high school graduates

- ◆ poor behaviour rating
- ◆ poor performance rating
- ◆ grade repetition
- ◆ felt teachers thought they would not do well
- ◆ felt teachers did not encourage students to express opinions
- ◆ did not feel safe at school
- ◆ mother felt youth was a difficult teen



Given these clusterings of characteristics among early school leavers, it is not surprising that such exclusion continues into later life. By the time they reach their early twenties, in comparison to grade 12 graduates, early school leavers are:

- ◆ 10 times as likely to be out of the workforce or training (51 versus 5 percent),
- ◆ 5 times as likely to smoke (65 versus 12 percent), and
- ◆ 9 times as likely to require social assistance (27 versus 3 percent).

Almost half of the young women who drop out of school before grade 12 are single mothers by the time they reach their twentieth birthday. Young men who drop out of school are more likely to come into conflict with the law. Many of the issues we consider as separate or distinct “social problems” have, in fact, arisen through similar predispositional processes of exclusion.

Where Do We Go?

One can view inclusion from two primary perspectives – the perspective of the group or the perspective of the individual. From the perspective of the larger, or more dominant group, inclusion is a question of socializing the individual to fit into accepted attitudes, behaviours, and practices. From the perspective of the individual, inclusion means finding a niche within larger social systems – a place, a role, an identity.

Our success in moving toward a more inclusive society can be gauged on both a societal and an individual level. From the perspective of the larger society, exclusion manifests itself through school drop out rates, human resource deficits, rising crime rates, and a general breakdown of the social fabric. From the perspective of the individual, exclusion is manifested through isolation, mental health problems, unemployment, poverty, or, in extreme cases, incarceration. The question is how to develop a research and policy agenda that can enhance inclusion and diminish the multitude of problems associated with exclusion.

Two of the primary roles for research within an inclusive agenda are:

- ◆ to examine the processes of identity formation, communication, and coping strategies that can assist in developing healthy relationships,
- ◆ to explore the mechanisms by which social systems foster, or alternatively undermine, the development of such relationships.

Whereas the first type of research supports psychologists and social workers in their work with individuals, families, and communities, the second type of research is particularly important for analysts developing public policy and programming. Both interpersonal and system-focused research efforts are critical for enhancing inclusion and diminishing the negative consequences of exclusion. For example, one must help parents overcome their personal problems if one wants to help their children. At the same time, one must examine how larger systems such as schools, communities, or labour markets serve to promote or undermine the well being of both parents and children.

◆ **seek a better understanding of the conditions that serve to strengthen or undermine relationships in families, schools, and communities**

As the findings from the FMP demonstrate, no one factor can explain all there is to know about the compounding processes that lead to the most severe forms of exclusion. Rather, those who find themselves outside the school system, outside the labour market, without a home, or, in extreme cases, in a penitentiary, have more typically experienced many difficulties that have multiplied, rather than diminished, over time.

It is not surprising that a child whose mother has a grade 8 education, who lives most of their life in poverty, who experiences many different family arrangements, and who moves numerous times, will find it difficult to keep up with peers in the school system. It is also not surprising that children from such home environments are more likely to be perceived by their teachers as withdrawn, inattentive, hyperactive, and/or underachieving. Hence, problems at home spill over into problems at school. What is more, complaints from school tend to aggravate already stressful home environments.

Children who come from homes with the least resources are not only the most likely to experience problems at school but also once such problems arise their parents are least well equipped to assist with getting them back on track. Families with lower levels of parental education and fewer financial resources are less likely to have pre-established relationships with the school system through volunteer activities, more likely to feel intimidated by school staff, less able to assist with homework, and have less disposable income available to hire a tutor or pay for private schooling (Dechman, 2002). Hence, families with few social or economic resources can find themselves powerless in combating the downward spiral of exclusion once it is set in motion.

Because social exclusion occurs as a process, promoting inclusion requires careful consideration of the many forms through which relationships are either developed or dissolved along the way. What conditions contribute to the strains placed on relationships within the family? What conditions strain relationships between child, family, school, and community? How could we move from blaming or punitive to mutually-supportive relationships?

◆ **move beyond program evaluation to explore more comprehensive research and planning strategies**

Much research concentrates on the examination of the relative strength of one particular factor such as poverty, education, family structure, or residential mobility in predicting a particular outcome such as early school leaving, unemployment, health problems, or incarceration. While such analyses are important for the development of explanatory models, they unfortunately sometimes give policy makers the mistaken impression that programming can be focused on one specific area without consideration of many other inter-related conditions.

Skill enhancement is often looked to for the resolution of many problems because educational attainment is strongly correlated with a vast array of social, economic, civic, and health outcomes. While educational attainment is definitely a prerequisite for inclusion in contemporary society, programming exclusively directed at enhancing achievement may exacerbate rather than diminish the prevalence of exclusion. The concern is that those who experience problems at school because of difficulties at home carry such problems with them into educational support, tutoring, or upgrading initiatives. The child whose reading program at school is supplemented by parental support is likely to progress more quickly than the child whose parent is illiterate. The child who has a stable home environment is likely to progress more quickly than the child who experiences many changes in family arrangements, moves numerous times, or is fearful of violence in his home or community. Likewise, the single mother who returns for upgrading is more likely to be successful if she has stable secure living arrangements than if she has no child-rearing support, is experiencing abuse, or is forced to vacate her place of residence because of an inability to pay the rent.

If programming is focused on any one area without simultaneously encompassing many other associated problems, those who experience the most pervasive difficulties will continue to be labeled as failures. Because no one program is likely to provide the magic bullet solution for the many problems facing socially-excluded individuals, they tend to become labeled as hopeless. Hence, narrowly focused programming can exacerbate rather than diminish exclusion, even when it is directed toward a critical component of inclusion such as educational attainment.

What is required to confront the many and compounding effects of exclusion is not only more comprehensive programming but also more comprehensive evaluation methods. In addition to measuring the success of any particular initiative such as tutoring or upgrading, what is required is a long-term facilitative research strategy that recognizes and monitors multiple real-life constraints and gauges movement in a positive direction rather than expecting immediate success. The most severe forms of exclusion have neither developed nor can they be resolved overnight.

While formative program evaluation is important for the continuous improvement of programming, the assessment of long-term outcomes, particularly among socially excluded groups, must be approached through more comprehensive longitudinal methodologies. Rather than the unit of analysis remaining at the program level, it must be expanded to include studies focusing on individuals and families. As long as we ask only what percentage of participants accomplish the end result toward which a particular program is directed, the most disadvantaged participants will continue to be labeled failures and in some cases even restricted from future access to such programs because the content is judged to be ineffective for them.

Looking at social policy and programming from an individual or family perspective sheds a different light on the pursuit of an inclusion agenda. The critical research questions change from “how successful is this specific program?” to “how do a variety of systems and structures fit together to either enhance or impede the process of inclusion?” By following the life course of the individual or the family unit, it becomes possible to better understand, develop programming, and evaluate the success of system modifications in constructing a place for, as opposed to excluding, particular families and children.

◆ **identify opportunities for mutually-reinforcing, inclusive approaches to social policy development**

The amount of exclusion that occurs is, to a large extent, determined by the variety and availability of opportunities for inclusion. Social systems that promote rigid narrow definitions of success or inclusion strain many relationships extending from the child to the family, the school, the labour market, and the community. One fundamental truth, that is too often overlooked, is that every person is unique. Each child comes into the

world with different physical, emotional, and cognitive characteristics, and their life subsequently evolves through a multiplicity of changing circumstances. Whereas some children live continuously in a two-parent family, others alternate among a number of different living arrangements including grand-parent, lone-parent, and/or foster families. Some children live in the same community until they reach adulthood, others move five, ten, or even twenty times. Some children have parents with Ph.Ds, while others have parents who have not had the opportunity to learn to read or write. For some children, their language of instruction is the language they speak at home; for others, it is not. Some children's families have continuously employed parents with relatively high incomes, others experience unemployment, short-term or long-term poverty. Despite the pervasiveness of such diversity, our conceptions of "success" often treat difference as an anomaly or nuisance, rather than a fundamental reality.

The grading system in schools provides a striking example of how rigid measurements of achievement can do more to hamper than to facilitate positive outcomes. There are a thousand and one reasons why some children will start at different levels and progress at different rates than other children. Yet, we persist in defining each child's success in reference to their peers rather than in reference to their own progressive accomplishments. Can we expect that a child who has repeated ear infections or other illnesses will be able to perform at the same rate as another child who has experienced no such difficulties? Can we expect that a child whose mother has been beaten, whose father has lost his job, whose brother has run away from home, or whose sister has taken an overdose will not to be distracted from their school work? Even though we know such things happen in real life, we persist in evaluating children's "success" as if this were not the case.

While academic standards and inclusion are presented by the media as competing objectives, inclusion may, in fact, offer the most promising opportunity for, rather than threat to, enhancing the human resource potential of our youth. As data from the FMP indicate, many of the young people who drop out before grade 12 do so not because they are unable to grasp the course material but rather because other compounding conditions have compromised their relationship with the school system. Thus, improving educational outcomes depends on addressing the many manifestations of exclusion.

Consider the outcomes promoted by two different types of educational systems: the first following a rigid grading system based on group comparisons, the second following a more flexible system based on individual progress. Under the first system, if the child fails to meet the expected competencies in all subject areas they are held back a year. Such grade repetition means that the student will be separated from their peer group, will repeat material they already covered, and will in many cases be perceived by teachers and other students as either slow or underachieving. Not uncommonly, discussions between teachers, parents, and the student focus on uncovering and correcting “the problem”, and rapidly deteriorate into reciprocal assignments of blame.

Contrast this first scenario with a second educational system based on an individual growth, rather than a competitive, model. Within this second system, the child’s achievements are monitored on the basis of their personal progression within a number of different subject areas. Success becomes measured by the personal mastery of successive competencies, rather than the mastery of the same competencies at a standardized rate. Under such a model of individual progress, difference can be seen for what it is - difference. Children do not become stigmatized through conspicuous grade repetition but rather are blended into a dynamic learning environment. Such a system allows for differential rates of progress and enhances the probability that each child will find at least one area in which they receive positive messages about their capabilities.

We must seriously consider which of these two systems is likely to maximize the development of human potential. Can we afford either economically or socially to exclude youth from a basic secondary education because their life circumstances make it difficult for them to perform at what is considered to be the “normal” rate? Or, would inclusive individualized progress assessment be more likely to promote the diversity of human resources required by current dynamic, service, knowledge, and technology-based economies?

In Conclusion

Major social problems are unlikely to succumb to any single solution; rather, addressing the multiple forms of exclusion must come from multi-faceted mutually reinforcing

programming. We must be wary of one-dimensional conceptions of success, single-focused programming or evaluation, and the promotion of adversarial strategies. While confronting the underlying dimensions of exclusion may be a daunting task, the rewards to be reaped are great. If our most severe problems in health, employment, and justice can be traced to similar pre-dispositional factors, addressing these factors has the potential to improve many facets of life for all citizens.

Endnotes

- 1 The FMP project started over twenty years ago with a sample of 716 mothers who gave birth to their first child in a Nova Scotia hospital in 1978. The original sample was stratified on the basis of marital status. Half of the mothers were married when their first child was born and half were single when their first child was born. By drawing two comparable samples of married and single mothers, it is possible to give statistically-reliable estimates of outcomes for both family types. Weighting the data to compensate for the over-representation of single mothers also makes it possible to provide information on families in general.

Data collections for this project were conducted when the children were approximately 6 weeks, 9 months, 18 months, 10 years, and 20 years of age. The 6-week, 9-month, and 18-month data collections consisted of personal interviews with the mothers. The 10-year data collection consisted of personal interviews with mothers and psychological assessments of a sample of 223 of the children. The 20-year data collection consisted of telephone interviews with both the mother and their son or daughter, who was, by then, a young adult. Seventy percent (N = 500) of the mothers who started the project in 1978 were still involved in the 1999 data collection. Eighty-six percent (N = 428) of the sons/daughters of these mothers also participated in the 1999 data collection.

- 2 While less than a grade 12 education would be considered exclusionary today, less than a grade 10 education would have been considered exclusionary twenty years ago when the FMP began. Many of the women who started parenting with grade 10 or 11 twenty years ago had not dropped out of school but rather had chosen to follow a vocational route.

Sources

- DECHMAN, Margaret (2002). Leaving School or Continuing: What Makes the Difference. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Community Services.
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/files/fm.asp>
- (2001). Social Exclusion and Social Assistance. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/files/fm.asp>
- (2000) The Dynamics of Family Life. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/files/fm.asp>
- MACDONALD, Robert (ed.) (1997). Youth, the Underclass and Social Exclusion. New York: Routledge.
- MEAD, Lawrence M. (1996). 'Welfare Reform and Children.' in Zigler, Kagan, and Hall (ed.) Children, Families, and Government. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- MURRAY, Charles (1995). 'The Next British Revolution.' The Public Interest. Winter. (1990). 'The British Underclass.' The Public Interest. Spring.
- NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WELFARE (1998). 'Profiles of Welfare: Myths and Realities.' <http://www.ncwcnbes.nte/htmldocument/reportprowelfare/reprowelfare.htm>
- PHOENIX, Ann (1991), 'Mother Under Twenty: Outsider and Insider Views.' In Ann Phoenix, Anne Woollett, and Eva Lloyd (eds.) Motherhood: Meanings, Practices, and Ideologies. London: Sage Publications.
- SATTLER, J. M. (1988). Assessment of Children (3rd ed.) San Diego, CA
- UPCHURCH, Dawn M. and James MCCARTHY (1990). 'The Timing of a First Birth and High School Completion.' American Sociological Review. Vol. 55, 224-234.
- WILLIANSON, Howard (1997). 'Status Zero Youth and the Underclass.' in Youth the Underclass and Social Exclusion, Robert MacDonald (ed.) New York: Routledge.

Operational Definitions of Concepts

For the purposes of this report, **early school leaving** refers to the 20-year old's reporting of having left the school system at some time before completing grade 12. Two questions were used to develop this measure. The first asked "Later on we will be asking about any university, technical, vocational, GED, upgrading or other adult education you may have taken, but could you first tell me what was the highest grade you completed before going on to any other type of education; for example, grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12." Those who responded that they had completed grade 12 were then asked a subsequent question "Did you ever drop out of school at any time before completing grade 12". If the respondent answered less than grade 12 to the first question or responded 'yes' to the second question, they were considered to have left the school system at some time before completing grade 12.

The **mother's original educational attainment** was measured by her self report at the time her first child was born.

Changes in family composition include: one-parent, two-parent biological, two-parent reconstituted, extended family, foster families, living with friends, and living on the streets.

A two-parent family includes both biological and reconstituted families.

The FMP included a full residential history at both the 10 and 20 year data collections. **Total moves** refers to the number of residential changes over the 20-year duration of the project.

Poverty was operationalized using Statistics Canada Low Income Cutoffs. The experience of poverty was categorized as: not living below the poverty line at either the 10 or 20 year data collection, living below the poverty line at either the 10 or 20 year data collection but not at both times, or living below the poverty line at both time periods.

The **acceptability of living accommodations** was measured by the mother's assessment.

At the time of the 20-year data collection, mothers were asked about the allocation of child rearing responsibilities in the areas of:

- ◆ taking the child to the doctor
- ◆ looking after the child when they were ill
- ◆ taking the child to special events
- ◆ setting rules
- ◆ helping with homework
- ◆ working through problems
- ◆ taking child to practices, games, lessons, and clubs.

For each of these areas, the mother indicated if she took primary responsibility (0), someone else took primary responsibility (1), or she and someone else had shared responsibility about equally (.5). An initial total support value of 3.5, which indicates 50/50 sharing, can be reached in a number of ways. The most obvious is when the person indicated they had equally shared all activities. However, a value of 3.5 could also be derived in other situations, for example, when the respondent said they took primary responsibility for 3 areas, someone else took primary responsibility for three areas, and one area was equally shared; or when the respondent took primary responsibility for 2 areas, someone else took primary responsibility for 2 areas, and 3 areas were equally shared. A value of 0 indicated that the mother took primary responsibility for all areas and a value of 7 indicates someone else took primary responsibility for all areas. The final score reflects the degree to which child-rearing responsibilities were shared or concentrated in one person, either the mother or someone else. This measure has been calculated as the absolute value of total support minus 3.5, with a value of 0 indicating equal sharing across all areas and a value of 3.5 indicating either the mother or someone else took primary responsibility for all aspect of child rearing. The primary caregiver was considered to have little **support for child rearing** if this measure assumed a value of 3.5.

School behavioural and performance indicators were derived from the Teacher's Achenbach Checklist.

Grade repetition was self reported by youth.

The youth's reporting of **school experiences** was based on the following split choice questions:

Overall, did you feel your teachers:

thought you would do well in life

thought you would not do well in life

Generally, would you say your teachers:

discouraged students from expressing
their own opinions

encouraged students to express their
own opinions

At the time of the 20-year data collection, mothers were asked to reflect on their experiences during the **teen years**. The teenage years are often a difficult time for families. Compared to other families you know, would you say you had a: very difficult, somewhat difficult, not very difficult, or not at all difficult time with [NAME] when [he/she] was a teenager?

The youth's perception of **safety at school** was measured using the following question:

We sometimes hear in the media about violence and harassment in schools. Did you feel safe going to school? Would you say you always, usually, sometimes, not very often, or never felt safe attending school.