

THE PROGRESS OF CANADA'S CHILDREN

2002 HIGHLIGHTS



Portrait of Children and Youth

- More Canadian children are living in large urban centres. By the year 2000, almost two-thirds (64%) of all children and youth under 20 lived in large urban centres – up from 56% in 1994.
- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of births to older women. Between 1994 and 1998, there was a 12% increase in births to women aged 35 to 39, and a 21% increase in births among women aged 40 to 44. At the same time, there was a 13% drop in the number of births to women aged 20 to 24.
- Children and youth make up more than half of the Aboriginal population, whereas they comprise only 33% of the general Canadian population. More than one-quarter of Aboriginal families with young children are headed by single parents and 39% of Aboriginal single mothers earn less than \$12,000 per year.
- In 2000, just over 51,000 children under age 15 immigrated to Canada – up 13% from 1990. More than half (56%) of recent immigrant children belong to visible minority groups – up from 32% among those who immigrated before 1986. Almost two of every three children who came to Canada between 1997 and 1999 could speak neither English nor French upon their arrival. ♦
(See interesting data on immigrant kids' relationships in the Social Engagement section).

Family Life

- Canadian families are changing. While the vast majority of children (84%) live in two-parent families, a growing number are living in lone-parent families. The proportion of children under 12 living in lone-parent families increased from 13% in 1994 to 16% by 1998. An increasing proportion of children are living in step-families: among children under 12, almost 400,000 (or 8.8%) lived in step-families in 1998, up from 7.5% in 1994.
- The majority (63%) of children under age 15 in two-parent families had both parents working full-time. Research shows that children do better when at least one parent works full-time. When both parents worked part-time or less, the children were less likely to be in excellent health or do very well in school.
- Support for parents – from other family members, friends or neighbours – is important in helping them to cope with the stresses of raising children. While fewer families overall are reporting low levels of social support, the incidence is rising among low-income families. In 1998, about 20% of children whose family income was under \$20,000 per year had parents who reported low levels of social support, compared to only 4% of children whose family income was over \$80,000.
- The majority of Canadian children live with parents who are in good health, but children living in low income are less likely to have this advantage. For example, among children in very poor families – those with household incomes under \$20,000 – more than 20% lived with a depressed parent, compared with 5% of children in households with incomes over \$40,000.
- Parents are having greater difficulty balancing their work and family lives. In 2001, 74% of working women with children reported having too much to do, up from 67% in 1991. For working fathers, the rate was 55% in 2001, up from 45% in 1991. Mothers report higher levels of stress and depression than do women without children.

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HIGHLIGHTS



- Children in families which are struggling are more likely to be excluded from some of the fundamental aspects of life essential to their healthy development. For example, children are less likely to have positive experiences at school, they are less likely to participate in recreation, and less likely to get along with friends if they live with parents who are depressed, do not function well, are violent, or poor.
- Recent immigrant children and their families have different experiences than Canadian-born children and their families. Children who have recently immigrated to Canada (that is, since 1986) are more likely to have parents who work more than 50 hours per week. In spite of this, they are more likely to be poor – one-third of recent immigrant children live below the Low Income Cut-off, compared with one-fifth of non-immigrant children.
- Fortunately, the majority of Canadian children live in families which function well, and this has held steady since 1994 – 88% of families with children under 16 function well. ♦


Economic Security (income discrepancies and their impacts, cost of living)

- In Canada, rich families continue to get richer, and poor families continue to get poorer. Between 1984 and 1999, the average net wealth of the top 20% of couples with children increased by 43%. Among the middle 20% of couples, it grew by just 3%, and for families at the bottom of the income scale, it fell by more than 51%!

- In 1999, 18.5% of Canadian children lived in poverty – down from 21.3% in 1993, but still up from the 15.2% recorded in 1989 when the House of Commons unanimously committed to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. In provinces with strong economic growth in the 1990s – notably Alberta and Ontario – the child poverty rate has fallen to the lowest levels in Canada, but the depth of poverty is higher there than in most other provinces. This almost certainly reflects the deep cuts made to social assistance rates in both those provinces.
- Toronto has been particularly hard hit by economic disparities. In 1999, almost one in three children in the city (32.2%) lived in a low-income household. This was up from 30.8% in 1995. Between 1990 and 1999, lone-parent families in Toronto experienced a whopping 18% decline in their already low incomes. In 1999, lone parents with one child had a median income that was a staggering 43% *below* the Low Income Cut-off (LICO).
- Children who live in persistent poverty are less likely to be included in aspects of society that are critical to their healthy growth and development. They were twice as likely to live in a “dysfunctional” family, twice as likely to live with violence, and more than three times as likely to live with a depressed parent. Only half of the children who lived in persistent poverty participated in recreation at least once a week, compared to three-quarters of those children who had never been poor.
- Families are spending more of their income on education and health. In 1992, a two-parent family with children under age 17 spent \$763 per year on education, but that had doubled to \$1,461 by 1999. Two-parent families with children spent \$1,505 on health care costs in 1999, up from \$1,410 in 1998. ♦



Physical Safety (environment, accidents)

- Children are particularly susceptible to environmental hazards, but the majority of substances in use in Canada today have not been adequately assessed for their unique risks to children. Scientists keep finding that toxic chemicals at surprisingly low doses have significant – often permanent – effects on children’s development.
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- There is mounting evidence about potential harm to children from pesticide compounds. Recent studies have linked pesticides to leukemia and brain cancer in children, as well as to neurological and developmental disorders. A number of municipalities have set their own rules for pesticide use, and this has recently been upheld in the Supreme Court.
 - Childhood asthma is now the most common chronic childhood illness in Canada. In 1998/99, asthma accounted for one-quarter of all school absenteeism in Canada. A number of international studies suggest that changes in the environment may be contributing to the increase in childhood asthma. Between 1994 and 1998, the number of days of fair and poor air quality increased in Canada.
 - Canada produces 21 million tons of garbage every year and we are second only to the U.S. in the amount of trash per person we generate.
 - Motor vehicle mishaps remained a leading cause of injury and death for children and youth over the 1990s. However, the use of seat belts among young people declined between 1996 and 1998. While 74% of all 12- and 13-year-olds reported using a seat belt in 1996, that proportion was down to 69% by 1998. ♦

Community Resources

- The housing crisis continues for Canadian children and families. The number of families who pay more than 30% of their pre-tax income on dwelling costs rose by 91% between 1989 and 1996. The number of households that pay more than 50% of their income on rent rose by 43% between 1990 and 1995. As a result, families are the fastest growing segment of the population requiring emergency shelter.
- The number of affordable housing units produced by the federal government dropped from more than 24,000 in 1980 to just 940 in 2000.
- The demand for child welfare services continues to grow. Six of the nine provinces that participated in a CCSD survey reported an increased number of children and youth living in care.
- Children with special needs are not being served adequately. A CCSD survey of 112 community agencies working with children and youth found that the majority do not have the financial resources they need or the trained personnel they require. Children with mental health problems and those with behavioural difficulties are the least likely to be adequately served.
- Post-secondary education is becoming less and less affordable. University tuition fees are rising far more quickly than inflation. Between 1990 and 2000, inflation rose by 20.5%, while tuition fees climbed by 135.4%, or six times faster!
- There are worrisome signs for education in Canada. In Ontario, a significant proportion of schools lost specialized teaching staff between 1997/98 and 2001/02. For example, the number of schools with a teacher-librarian dropped from 80% to 59%; those with music teachers dropped from 58% to 44%; those with physical education teachers dropped from 41% to 32%; and those with ESL programs dropped from 58% to 40%. Waiting lists for special education increased by 14% over that period, and the number of schools with only a part-time principal doubled.

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HIGHLIGHTS



- So what is happening? Increasingly, some parents are choosing private education for their children. Between 1994/95 and 1998/99, enrollment in Canada's private schools grew by almost 10%. The trend is most pronounced in Ontario and BC, where private school enrollment grew by 20% and 18% respectively. Saskatchewan bucked this trend, with private school enrollment dropping by 23% over that period.
- Private tutoring centres are also becoming more popular. Average monthly enrollment at the Sylvan Learning Centres, for example, more than doubled between 1995 and 2000. ♦

Civic Vitality (neighbourhoods)

- Civic communities are important to healthy child development. Young children who live in neighbourhoods with plentiful community resources such as parks, libraries and recreational areas score better on tests of physical, emotional, social and intellectual development than do children from neighbourhoods with fewer civic resources.
- The majority of school-aged children in Canada feel safe in their neighbourhoods. And the majority of parents feel they live in neighbourhoods which support their children – over 90% feel that adults look out for children and there are adults that children look up to.

- However, this is not the case for poor children. A study of poor children living in Edmonton found that the children expressed more anxiety about the safety of their neighbourhoods than they did about a lack of food or other material necessities. ♦



Health Status (hunger, obesity, vulnerable children)

- Approximately 75,000 Canadian families experienced hunger in 1996 – 21,000 more families than in 1994. That's a lot of hungry families in a wealthy nation like Canada.
- A lack of daily physical activity is seriously compromising the health of Canadian children and youth. Between 1981 and 1996, rates of obesity nearly tripled among boys (from 5% to 13.5%) and more than doubled among girls (from 5% to 11.8%).
- The rate of smoking among young people aged 15 to 24 has declined since 1994; however one-quarter of 15- to 19-year-old females and more than one-third of young men aged 20 to 24 smoke. Smoking among youth is unevenly distributed across Canada.

- The rates of sexually transmitted infections are rising among young Canadians. Chlamydia rates for youth aged 15 to 24 declined from 1992 to 1997, but since then, rates have risen. Young people aged 15 to 24 account for almost 70% of all reported cases of Chlamydia.
- Young people are concerned about their ability to access health care services. In 2000, only two-thirds of 16- to 24-year-olds were confident that they would have access to the necessary health care should they or a family member become ill. Young people living in low income were less likely to be confident.
- A survey of Aboriginal youth in Ontario revealed that many had experienced some form of sexual abuse: 61% of female respondents and 35% of males. Those who had experienced abuse were more likely to have unprotected sex and to be involved in a teen pregnancy.
- Aboriginal children are much more likely than other children in Canada to die from injuries: the rate of death from injuries is four times greater for Aboriginal infants, and among preschoolers, the rate is five times greater.
- Emotional strain is high among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth in British Columbia. A survey of these young people indicated that 46% have attempted suicide at least once, and almost 40% have dramatically low self-esteem. ♦



Social Engagement (missing kids, violence, friendships)

- In 2000, the number of missing children in Canada was at its highest level since 1995, and there were 50,633 child runaways, the highest number ever recorded.
- That same year, the Kids Help Phone received an average of 1,000 calls every day, up 25% from 1999. Hits to the Kids Help Phone website (kidshelp.sympatico.ca) more than doubled from 1998 to 2000.
- About 8% of children aged 4 to 11 witnessed adults or teens in their home physically fighting, hitting or trying to hurt others in 2000. Witnessing violence in the home makes children more likely to exhibit hyperactive behaviour, have emotional disorders, and be physically aggressive.
- After four years of decline, the rate of youth charged with violent crimes increased by 7% in 2000 – the largest yearly increase since 1991. These rising rates for violent crimes and lower rates for property offences among youth echo the same trend in the adult population.
- Young people are less likely to get along with their siblings than with their parents. In 1998, 42% of young people aged 10 to 13 said they had no problems with their mothers, and 40% said they had no problems with their fathers – but only 15% got along very well with their siblings.
- Children who immigrated to Canada have strong relationships with their friends, family and teachers – and in some cases are faring better in those relationships than their

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HIGHLIGHTS

Canadian-born peers. Children who immigrated since 1986 reported having more close friends than did both children who came to Canada earlier and non-immigrant children: 81% of recent immigrant children reported having 3 or 4 close friends, compared with 77% of non-immigrant children and 74% of earlier immigrant children. ♦

- Canadian students rank near the top in standardized international testing programs. Canadian students ranked 2nd in reading, 6th in math, and 5th in science among the 32 countries surveyed. In all countries, students from higher socio-economic backgrounds perform better than do students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. ♦

Learning



- Almost three-quarters of Canadian parents say they hope their children (aged 6 to 15) will go on to university, but in 1998, only 28% of 18- to 21-year-olds did so. University attendance is tied to parental income: only 19% of young people in the lowest income quartile attended, compared with 39% in the highest.

- Young men have a higher high school drop-out rate than do women: by age 20, 15% of Canadian men are failing to meet what is considered to be the minimum educational standard compared with 9% of young women. However, among both sexes the rate has declined since the early 1990s.
- The majority of Canadian parents continue to be involved in their children's schooling, but the way parents are involved is changing. Between 1996 and 1998, fewer parents had attended sports or cultural events at their children's schools, but they were more likely to have been involved in fundraising efforts for the schools.
- Schools seem to provide fewer opportunities for parental involvement as children get older: 42% of parents of children aged 6 to 11 strongly agreed that the school offered them the opportunity for involvement, compared to only 15% of parents of children aged 14 to 15.
- Parents don't have a very good grasp of what their children are doing on the Internet. While the majority of parents said that their children do "homework," on the net, children placed homework near the bottom of their list of Internet activities.



Labour Force Profile of Youth

- Gender disparities in the labour force begin at an early age. Among 14- and 15 year-olds, boys were almost twice as likely as girls to work for an employer. Girls were more likely to do odd jobs for pay.
- Young men aged 15 to 24 earned significantly more than women of the same age – averaging \$10.11 versus \$9.05 per hour.
- Young men are more confident about their abilities to find jobs than are young women. Among those aged 16 to 24, 73% of men expressed confidence that they could find an equivalent job within six months in the case of a job loss, compared to only 68% of women.
- The unemployment rate for youth aged 20 to 24 dropped a full percentage point – from 11.2% in 1999 to 10.2% in 2000 – almost attaining its low 1989 rate of 9.9%.
- Young workers are at high risk of being injured on the job. Workers aged 15 to 24 accounted for 17% of all workplace injuries in 1999. There were over 62,000 time-loss injuries among that age group. ♦