

Almost half of Status First Nations children live in poverty, study finds ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

An astounding 47 percent of Status First Nations children in Canada live in poverty, two-and-a-half times above the national average, says a new study on child poverty.

Some 122,400 — or 53 per cent — of those on reserves live below Statistics Canada's after-tax low-income measure, compared to 131,660, or 41 per cent, of their off-reserve peers. The low-income cutoff for a family of four was \$44,266 in 2016.

"Child poverty rates on First Nations reserves are deplorably high for a country as rich as Canada," said report co-author David Macdonald, senior economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which is jointly releasing the study on Tuesday with the Assembly of First Nations and Upstream, a non-partisan national think tank aimed at building a healthier society. "What's worse is that these rates haven't shown any improvement since 2005."

Using census data from 2006 to 2016, researchers tracked poverty rates among Status and Non-status First Nations children on-and-off reserve, their Inuit and Métis counterparts, as well as recent immigrant children and non-racialized, non-Indigenous kids. Status First Nations people are registered members of a band that signed a treaty with the Crown and can take advantage of the rights and benefits under the Indian Act.

Overall, Status First Nations child poverty rates have fallen from 52 per cent to 47 per cent in the last decade, but the decline is largely due to the proportion of those children living off reserve.

Provincially, Quebec has the lowest child poverty rate for Status First Nations children living on reserves, at 29 per cent, while those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have a staggering 65 per cent poverty rate.

The study, "Towards Justice: Tackling Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada," also found that some 35 per cent of recent immigrant children live in poverty, followed by Non-status First Nations children (32 per cent); Inuit children (25 per cent) and Métis and racialized children (22 per cent each). In comparison, only 12 per cent of children who are non-Indigenous, non-racialized and not recent immigrants live under the poverty line.

Macdonald attributed the low rate in Quebec to the Eeyou Istchee (James Bay Cree), whose child poverty rate, at 15 per cent, is even lower than the national average — something unique considering the low population density and remoteness of the fly-in communities along the northern coast of Hudson Bay.

First Nations children living on reserve have endured chronic underfunding by the federal government since 1996, when budgets were locked to inflation and were not adjusted based on need or population growth. However, First Nations and Inuit in northern Quebec are able to benefit from the Hydro Quebec resource-revenue sharing agreement to counter poverty.

"Income and Indigenous status are well-known social determinants of health," said Upstream executive director Trish Hennessy. "The impact of child poverty can affect their life chances."

The report calls for increased financial investment to tackle the continued challenges of inadequate and insufficient housing, nonpotable water, inferior education and health services faced by Indigenous children.

Related link: Towards justice: Tackling Indigenous child poverty in Canada ^[3]

Region: Canada ^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/07/almost-half-status-first-nations-children-live-poverty-study-finds> [2] https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2019/07/09/almost-half-of-status-first-nations-children-live-in-poverty-study-finds.html?fbclid=IwAR3VPjpY_r4E_XH8tBho5pT8LcsakOcZ0csZOmRFc0F63NakWuD0joom8DQA [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/19/07/towards-justice-tackling-indigenous-child-poverty-canada> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864>