

Large numbers of moody, tense kids out there, study suggests [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A new compilation of statistics is fresh fodder for activists pushing for a national program to help children and families.

A large number of Canadian children aged four to 11 - as described by their parents - are frequently moody, argumentative and stressed, says the latest edition of a major profile on Canadian kids being released Tuesday.

That's not news for most people raising kids, but some experts say there's plenty of room for concern.

"There are alarm bells going off and we need to be aware," said Dawn Walker, executive director of the Canadian Institute of Child Health which released the report.

The Health of Canada's Children, a collection of data on children and youth from Statistics Canada and recent academic studies, ranges from pre-conception to age 18...

A December deadline looms for the federal and provincial governments to hammer out a framework for a National Children's Agenda of early education and related programs. The process has so far stalled over squabbles about federal-provincial funding.

"As a society, we haven't responded to the needs of the modern family," said Chance.

A feeling of family disconnect increases in children as they age, Walker said, referring to a 1998 British Columbia study.

It showed the percentage of kids who feel strong family links drops from 25 per cent at age 12, to nine per cent at age 17.

More than 75 per cent of mothers with children aged six to 14 work, as do 70 per cent of those with kids under six, says the Canadian Child Care Federation.

Yet, a 1998 study showed there are only 500,000 regulated spaces across the country for almost 1.4 million Canadian children using paid child care.

Between 1991 and 1998, the proportion of workers with dependents who said family-work conflicts were stressing them out rose to 44 per cent from 38 per cent, the Canadian Council on Social Development reported last year.

Walker suspects that is reflected in children's stress levels as the pace of life keeps increasing.

This is the third edition of the CICH profile which last appeared in 1994.

It concludes with an open letter to Canada's decision-makers, calling for "integrated and co-ordinated economic and social policy that protects children and their families, and ensures comparable health and well-being to all regardless of socio-economic status."

Strong federal action will be vital "because this action must become our national priority," it concludes.

-Reprinted from Canadian Press

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