

Child well-being in rich countries: A comparative overview ^[1]

Innocenti Report Card 11

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Source: UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

Format: Report

Publication Date: 10 Apr 2013

AVAILABILITY

- Report coverage on UNICEF Canada website ^[2]
- Full report in pdf ^[3]
- Canada Companion to UNICEF Report Card 11 in pdf ^[4]
- Infographic for Canada in pdf ^[5]
- Press Release for UNICEF Report Card 11 in pdf ^[6]
- Key Points for Canada in pdf ^[7]

Excerpts from *Stuck in the Middle* ^[4] - UNICEF Canada's companion report :

The story of Canada in Report Card 11 is one of a country stuck in the middle. Canada has a middle rank in the League Table of Child Well-being, and this position has not budged since we last measured it a decade ago. In some aspects of child well-being Canada shines, and it lags at the bottom in others - just like the pattern in many other countries. In most indicators, we have made progress over the past ten years. Just not enough to improve our middle rank among comparable countries.

The majority of Canada's children are faring well in any given indicator. Even where we are further behind other countries, in some cases it is not a great distance. Most children are immunized, most do not smoke and most have healthy weights. But in contrast to comparable countries, we have too many children who are left out of public health efforts and who are not benefitting from their years of compulsory education by going on to further education, training and employment. We are raising children in families squeezed for time as well as income. Children living in poverty are more likely to be left out because poverty, in and of itself, is a significant risk factor. But there are many conditions affecting childhood in Canada that cut across all socioeconomic levels, particularly risk behaviours. And because most children are in the middle of the socioeconomic gradient, that is where we find the greatest number who are developmentally vulnerable. If we want to improve the chances for all children, we need to boost interventions that reach all children.

The goal to promote the well-being of all children is a moral imperative. As a pragmatic imperative, it is equally deserving of priority. Failure to protect and promote the well-being of children is associated with increased risk and cost across a wide range of later-life outcomes. The indicators of child well-being are varied; but the confluence of poor performance is often seen early in impaired cognitive development and poor health, then lower school achievement, and on to lower productivity and earnings, high unemployment and welfare dependency, substance abuse, involvement in crime, increased mental illness and higher healthcare costs. The case for a greater national commitment to child well-being is therefore compelling both in principle and practice. And to fulfil that commitment, measuring progress in protecting and promoting the well-being of children is essential to policy-making and advocacy, to the cost-effective allocation of limited resources and to transparency and accountability.

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What's missing

Canadian data is missing in UNICEF's Report card in certain indicators (child deprivation rate, child and youth mortality rate, preschool enrolment rate, rooms per person and multiple housing problems) because we do not participate in the international surveys (primarily those administered in the European Union) from which the comparative data was drawn. However, data reported in 2007 on "rooms per person" in Canada (a proxy measure of housing overcrowding) was 1.5, similar to the top-performing nations in the current Report Card. A more meaningful indicator of housing problems for Canada's children would be access to affordable, safe housing; core housing need. **We can also estimate Canada's "percentage of children between 4 years and the start of compulsory education who are enrolled in preschool" at 62 per cent, which does not account for informal care but reflects the degree to which governments invest in preschool education and would place Canada at the bottom of that league table** (The source of this information is accredited to Martha Friendly and CRRU's data published by HRSDC in *Public investments in early childhood education and care 2010* ^[8]).

Region: International ^[9]

Tags: poverty ^[10]

health ^[11]

child development ^[12]

international organizations ^[13]

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