

Children, youth and poverty

Poverty is not going away¹

In 1989, the House of Commons resolved to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000, but by 1996 the child poverty rate had risen to 20.9% or 1.5 million. This was the highest it had been in 17 years.²

Despite improvements in Canada's economy over the past few decades, the rate and depth of poverty has deepened for many groups. Children have been particularly hard hit.

- One in six or 1.1 million children in Canada live in poverty.³
- 52.1% of Aboriginal children live in poverty. Many live in conditions similar to those in developing countries.⁴
- 89% of children under seven living with mothers who never married live in poverty.⁵
- Almost half of Canadian children living in poverty live in female lone-parent families.⁶
- Children in female lone-parent families are four times as likely to be poor as children in two-parent families.
- 91.3% of single mothers under 25 live in poverty.⁷
- 61.4% of single mothers under 65 with children under 18 live in poverty.⁸
- 36% of working single mothers raise their families on less than \$10/hour.
- 37% of visible minority women live in poverty.
- Aboriginal women have an average income of \$13,300 compared to \$18,200 for Aboriginal men and \$19,350 for non-Aboriginal women.

What kids say

When Grade 4 students in North Bay, Ontario, were asked to define poverty, these were their responses.

Poverty is:

- not being able to play soccer or hockey, take swimming lessons, or go on school trips or to camp
- being teased about clothes, being afraid to tell your mom or dad you need gym shoes or not buying books at the book fair
- not getting to go to birthday parties or have your friend sleep over
- not having breakfast, or pretending you forgot your lunch
- being ashamed when your dad or mom can't get a job or when you get a basket from the Santa Fund

¹ Unless otherwise noted, statistics for this Fact Sheet are from *The Face of Poverty in Canada: An Overview*, National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2003.

² BC Campaign 2000, 1997.

³ Campaign 2000, *Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada*, 2002.

⁴ Centre for International Child Health, 1994.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cited in the *2003 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada*, Statistics Canada.

⁷ Poverty Profile 1996, a report by the National Council of Welfare, 1998.

⁸ Ibid.

Family income and child development⁹

- Children in low-income families are over 2 1/2 times more likely than children in high-income families to have a problem with vision, hearing, speech or mobility.
- More than 35% of children in low-income families have delayed vocabulary development.
- Nearly 40% of children living in low-income families show high levels of indirect aggression, such as starting fights with their peers.
- Nearly 35% of children in low-income families live in substandard housing, compared to 15% of children in high-income families.
- More than 25% of children in low-income families live in problem neighbourhoods, compared to 10% of children in high-income families.
- Almost 75% of children in low-income families rarely participate in organized sports, compared to 25% of children in high-income families.

The impact of poverty¹⁰

Poverty undermines children's health in many complex ways. Research shows that compared to children in high-income groups, children ages 12 to 19 in welfare and working poor families were:

- three times as likely to live in a single-parent home
- twice as likely to live with a smoker and four times as likely to smoke themselves
- more prone to alcohol abuse
- less likely to have access to a doctor and need, but not receive, medical care
- more likely to suffer from a short-term disability

⁹ David Ross and Paul Roberts, *Income and Child Well-Being: A Perspective on the Poverty Debate*, Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999.

¹⁰ Cited in *Recreation and Children and Youth Living in Poverty: Barriers, Benefits and Success Stories*, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 2001.