

November 2003

Saskatchewan Child Poverty Report

...Children are hardest hit by poverty because it strikes at the very roots of their potential for development – their growing bodies and minds.

A World Fit For Children (para 18)
Millennium Development Goals
Special Session on Children's Documents
The Convention on the Rights of the Child
New York: United Nations Children's Fund 2002



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The Problem of Child Poverty

A high child poverty rate in rich nations such as Canada is a serious issue, as solid research exists that identifies the correlation between a lack of an adequate income and its potential impact on families and children. The Innocenti Report Card¹ on *Child Poverty in Rich Nations* (2000) has noted this basic fact:

Such statistics represent the unnecessary suffering and deprivation of millions of individual children. They also represent a failure to hold faith with the developed world's ideal of equality of opportunity. For no matter how many individual and anecdotal exceptions there may be, the fact remains that the children of the poor simply do not have the same opportunities as the children of the non-poor. Whether measured by physical or mental development, health and survival rates, educational achievement of job prospects, incomes or life expectancies, those who spend their childhood in poverty of income and expectation are at a marked and measurable disadvantage.

Research on child poverty in Canada demonstrates that the disadvantages for children in poor families include being more likely to grow up in substandard housing, to live in neighbourhoods with drug dealing and vandalism, to suffer health problems such as vision, hearing, mobility and cognition issues, and to participate less in organized sports or in arts programs.²

Child Poverty Then and Now, 1989 and 2001

The year 2001 marks the 12th anniversary of the Canadian House of Commons unanimous resolution to achieve the goal of eliminating child poverty by the year 2000. As the data³ indicates, the federal and provincial governments have failed to achieve that goal. Based on Statistics Canada LICO measure,⁴ it is evident that high levels of child

¹ UNICEF (2000). *The league table of child poverty in rich nations*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

² Ross, D., Scott, K., & Smith, P. (2000). *The Canadian fact book on poverty*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

³ Statistics Canada *Income Trends in Canada, 2001*, 13F0022XCB, prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development.

⁴ In this report Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO) using before-tax total income is the benchmark to identify poor children and their families. The data for poor children under 18 exclude those who are unattached individuals, those who are the major income earners or those who are the spouses or common law partners of the major income earners. In creating these survey data sets, Statistics Canada does not include families living in First Nation communities (reserves). For a methodological investigation of using before-tax total income rather than after-tax total income see SPR Working Paper #20, pp. 31-41 <http://www.uregina.ca/spr/publications/working.html>

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poverty have persisted up to and including 2001 in Canada. In 1989 (the year of the declaration to end child poverty in Canada by 2000) the national child poverty level was 14.4 per cent. Disturbingly, the incidence of child poverty in Canada had increased to 15.6% for the year 2001. According to Campaign 2000—an organization dedicated to seeing the Government of Canada fulfill its resolution to eliminate child poverty—one in six Canadian children, or 15.6%, were still poor in 2001.⁵

Saskatchewan's child poverty rate stood at 21.5% in 1989, rose to a high of 24% in 1994, fell to a low of 16.1% in 1999 and now sits at 17.6% (42,000) for 2001.⁶ Despite government resolution, a high incidence of child poverty continues.

Who Experiences the Problem of Child Poverty

Of all family groups, the highest **incidence of child poverty** in Saskatchewan occurs among female lone-parent families. In 2001, 48% (19,000) of all poor Saskatchewan children lived in female lone-parent families. The next highest group experiencing child poverty are two-parent families with children. During 2001, 11% (20,000) of poor Saskatchewan children lived in two-parent families.

Table 1. Incidence Rates. Child Poverty 1989, 2000, 2001 by Family Type using LICO 1992 Base

(child poverty rate in percent)

	Canada			Saskatchewan		
	1989	2000	2001	1989	2000	2001
All families	14.9	16.5	15.6	21.5	18.1	17.6
Two-parent families	10	11	11	16	11	11
Female lone-parent families	57	48	45	63	49	48

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development from Statistics Canada Data

⁵ See the Campaign 2000 web site for its 2003 report on child and family poverty, *Honouring Our Promises: Meeting the Challenge to End Child and Family Poverty*. On-line at www.campaign2000.ca

⁶ In the past 1986 and 1992 bases were used to calculate provincial rates. For this report only the 1992 base has been used therefore poverty numbers may appear slightly different than those cited in previous reports.

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Quite obviously, wages are extremely important when examining characteristics of poverty. Data published by the Canadian Council on Social Development (Jackson, 2001) demonstrates that a household with a single earner working 40 hours per week for the median salary of \$13.86 per hour is unlikely to be defined as low-income using the LICO measurement. However that is not the situation for a low-income family. The CCSD report states: “Indeed, a single parent family with one child cannot climb above the low income line on earnings from a low wage job alone.”⁷ A full-time job at the median wage in Canada is likely to bring a single parent family with one child above the LICOs; *a full-time job at a low wage is not enough to bring a single parent family with one child above the LICOs.*

A related concept to the incidence of poverty is the **depth of poverty** (see Table 2). Depth of poverty refers to how far below a poverty line an income falls⁸. The average low-income gap is calculated by determining the sum of all of the income amounts below the income cut-off levels created by Statistics Canada, and dividing that sum by the number of units (individuals, families). The measure is useful as it provides some idea of how much is needed to increase the income of people to the low-income cut-off levels.

Table 2. Depth of Poverty. Estimated Number of Average Income Gaps 1989, 2000, 2001 using LICO 1992 Base.

Average income gap (\$)

	Canada			Saskatchewan		
	1989	2000	2001	1989	2000	2001
Two-parent families	\$9,394	\$10,288	\$10,265	\$8,347	\$6,735	\$8,730
One earner	\$9,321	\$10,371	\$10,819	\$8,956	\$5,890	\$8,032
Two earners	\$8,263	\$8,200	\$7,213	\$7,579	\$4,920	\$7,321
Lone-parent families	\$9,179	\$8,689	\$8,773	\$9,950	\$7,941	\$7,393
Female lone-parent families	\$9,276	\$8,727	\$8,886	\$10,002	\$7,963	\$7,504

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development from Statistics Canada Data

7 Jackson, A. (2001). *Low Income Trends in the 1990s*. Canadian Council on Social Development. On-line at www.ccsd.ca/pubs2000/lit/

8 Ross, D., Scott, K., & Smith, P. (2000). *The Canadian fact book on poverty*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, p. 103.

During 2001, two-parent families with children in Saskatchewan saw an increase in the average income gap (amount of income to bring them up to the poverty cut-off lines) compared to 2000.

Child Poverty in Aboriginal Communities

Of all social groups, Aboriginal populations, which as a whole are denied the status of full social membership, experience the highest incidence of child poverty. The following table⁹ outlines the incidence of poverty amongst First Nations and Métis children of Saskatchewan.

Table 3. Incidence of Low-Income Among First Nations and Métis Peoples of Origin¹⁰ 0-14 Years of Age in Saskatchewan (2000 Income)

	First Nations	Métis
<i>Saskatchewan</i>	55.9%	36%
<i>Regina</i>	61.3%	45.7%
<i>Saskatoon</i>	61.7%	35.8%

Among First-Nations children ages 0-14 living off-reserve, the incidence of poverty is 55.9%, with the majority of those children living in Saskatchewan's urban centres. The poverty rate for Métis children in Saskatchewan aged 0-14 is 36%. At those rates of poverty, the basic requirements for food and shelter cannot be met. Issues of food security and shelter are constant threats for the poor in Saskatchewan, and especially so for First-Nations and Métis children.

Food Security

Stats Canada¹¹ health data on four income groups (low, lower middle, upper middle and high) reveals that in Saskatchewan 41.8% (40,933) of those within the low income quartile suffered from "some food insecurity in the past 12 months." In contrast only 3.6% (6,361) of individuals in the high income quartile reported food insecurity during the same period. Similarly, 23.9% (23,471) of the low-income quartile and only .46% (808) in the high-income quartile reported they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat.

9 Prepared by SPR from Statistics Canada, *2001 Census*. 97F0010XCB01043.

10 Refers to those persons who reported at least one Aboriginal origin to the ethnic origin question (North American Indian, Métis or Inuit). Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural group(s) to which the respondent's ancestors belong. On-reserve data are at this time unavailable to the provinces, as are census data on aboriginal identity.

11 Prepared by SPR using Statistics Canada, *Canadian Community Health Survey Cycle 1.1 2000-2001*, raw data.

Table 4. Food Insecurity in Saskatchewan 2000-2001 by Low and High Income Groups¹²

	Low income	High income
Worried not enough to eat (often or sometimes)	29.75%	1.3%
Did not have enough to eat (often or sometimes)	23.9%	0.46%
Some food insecurity in past 12 months (yes)	41.8%	3.6%

The Regina and District Food Bank statistics show that throughout 2001 the largest group of food bank users were children. On average, 4154 Regina and area children received food bank assistance each month during that year.

Table 5. Regina & District Food Bank Usage 2001 by Number of Children¹³

Age of Children	Number of Children on Food Bank Orders
0 – 5 years old	18,948
6 – 12 years old	20,521
Teens	10,388
Total Number of Children on the Food Order	49,857

Moving Forward: Economic Equality and Social Inclusion

Along with examining poverty through the lens of economic equality (or inequality) we can also examine poverty through the lens of social inclusion (or exclusion). The former is concerned with an analysis of redistribution of wealth and tends to focus on substantive outcomes, such as the incidence and depth of poverty. The latter is an emerging trend providing analysis of the impact of social exclusion and non participation. It focuses upon the redistribution of position and opportunities of marginalized peoples so they are not denied the status of full participants in social life.

¹² Income groups by quartile. Only Low and High income groups are shown for Saskatchewan. Low income quartile defined as total household income of < \$15,000 for 2 people; <\$20,000 for 3 or 4 people and <\$30,000 for 5 or more people. Highest income quartile defined as > \$60,000 for 2 people and > \$80,000 for 3 or more people.

Prepared by SPR using Statistics Canada, *Canadian Community Health Survey Cycle 1.1 2000-2001* Public Use Microdata File.

¹³ Prepared by SPR using data provided by the Regina & District Food Bank.

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Redistribution of wealth is a genuine response to the social injustice of poverty. Child poverty levels in Canada and in Saskatchewan would be even higher if it were not for social income transfer programs, including the national child benefit program and the federal early child development initiatives. Strengthening these support systems is essential to reducing child and family poverty.

A focus on social inclusion entails the reconstruction of those institutionalized practices and relations which reinforce particular values and impede active social membership. It would include social welfare policies that do not subordinate and diminish the poor, specifically, among other things, meaningful employment and training opportunities, housing strategies that allow for access to decent, affordable housing, and universal programs of early education and care.

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