

Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children & Youth 2001

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TRENDS IN THE WELL-BEING OF AMERICA’S CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Introduction

This is the sixth edition of an annual report from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on trends in the well-being of our nation's children and youth. The report presents the most recent and reliable estimates on more than 80 indicators of well-being. It is intended to provide the policy community, the media, and all interested citizens with an accessible overview of data describing the condition of children in the United States.

The indicators have been organized into five broad areas:

- Population, family, and neighborhood;
- Economic security;
- Health conditions and health care;
- Social development, behavioral health, and teen fertility; and
- Education and achievement.

For each indicator, the report provides graphics to highlight key trends and important population subgroup differences and tables that provide more detailed information for the interested user. These are accompanied by text that briefly describes the importance of each indicator and highlights the most salient features of the data.

Indicators Included in the Report

This report presents a broad and carefully chosen collection of national estimates of child and youth well-being. It reports indicators that have been collected more than once over the last few years so that trends may be presented. Where possible, trends are presented from the 1970s through the year 2000. In a few cases, data for earlier years are also presented, as are projections into the future.

Decisions regarding which indicators to include in the report have been guided by a combination of scientific and practical considerations. In preparation for the first edition of this report, a list of indicators was culled from over 20 papers presented at a major national conference on indicators of child well-being. At this conference, nationally recognized experts representing a broad spectrum of disciplines and research interests related to child well-being recommended key indicators that should be tracked on a regular basis by the federal statistical system.

The final list of indicators was modified based on a number of practical considerations that included data availability (the data needed to be available for a nationally representative sample and on a regular basis), timeliness (the estimates had to be available for 1990 or later), and quality and consistency (the data had to be both reliable and consistently measured over time).

Some sections of this report have been significantly revised since the 2000 edition of this report. Some indicators have been combined, such as youth homicides, youth suicides, and

firearms, while other indicators have been rewritten or replaced with new sources of data. Indicators have been removed for a variety of reasons, such as out-of-date information or replication of information in other reports produced by ASPE. The indicators that have been removed are:

- Children as a percentage of the dependent population;
- Long-term childhood poverty;
- Effect of government cash and near-cash transfer programs on poverty among persons living in families with children under 18;
- Long-term welfare dependence;
- Parental labor force detachment;
- Secure labor force attachment; and
- Lead exposure.

The Need for Better Data on Children

As this report demonstrates, the data available for tracking the well-being of children and youth at the national level are fairly extensive. Even so, there remain major gaps in the federal statistical system that must be filled if we are to have a complete picture of the quality of our children's lives.

We have few measures of social development and health-related behaviors for very young and pre-teenage children that are measured on a regular basis. For example, we currently lack good indicators of school readiness for young children. Measures of mental health for any age child are rare, although one such measure was recently added to the National Health Interview Survey. Positive measures of social development and related behaviors are also sparse, with the result that the current set of indicators may present a gloomier picture of our children's overall well-being (than is in fact the case). New indicators that reflect the positive developments we desire for our children and youth clearly need to be developed and incorporated into the federal statistical system.

We have very few indicators available that reflect important social processes affecting child well-being that go on inside the family and within the neighborhood. Measures of parent-child interactions, critical to the social and intellectual development of children, are only now beginning to work their way into regularly repeated national surveys. We currently lack an annual measure of whether both biological parents of a child are in the household, in addition to reliable indicators of child homelessness.

Other important areas in need of measurement development or improvements in the quality, consistency, and frequency of available data include: child abuse and neglect, youth violent crime, day care quality, learning disabilities, and measures of children in institutionalized care.

Finally, data used to track the well-being of children at the state and local levels are much less plentiful than the information available at the national level. As state and local governments take on increasing levels of responsibility for the design and implementation of many types of government programs affecting children, youth, and their families, the need for such information is increasing. The federal statistical system is positioned to play a significant role in increasing the availability of such data for use at the state and local levels.

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (the Forum), an interagency group of leaders of federal agencies and departments responsible for collecting data on children and youth, has adopted a mandate to improve the federal statistical system regarding data on children, youth, and their families. Member agencies have played a crucial role in the production of this report, providing data and carefully reviewing relevant text. The Forum, created in 1994, and formally established by Executive Order in 1997, will continue to develop strategies for improving the federal statistical system in ways that preserve existing data in these areas while filling in the data gaps described above.

For example, member agencies have recently been working to develop new indicators in several areas where they are currently lacking. A subcommittee on fatherhood has been established and is working with agency researchers and members of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Family and Child Well-being Research Network to develop new indicators related to fathering and male fertility and incorporating them into federal surveys where appropriate. In addition, the Department of Agriculture has recently developed a measure of food security for children which is also included in this report. As additional measures from these and similar efforts become available, they will be incorporated into future editions of the report.

Using the Document

In the presentation of data for this report, percents and rates were, as a rule, rounded to the nearest whole number. Estimates based on the Decennial Census, the National Vital Statistics System, and surveys with very large sample sizes were often presented to one decimal place since differences of less than one percentage point are often significant from these sources.

Practical considerations did not allow for the use of tests of statistical significance for all cross-time and between-group differences discussed in the text, though they were used in a few cases. When such tests were not available, differences were either not reported in the text or were reported cautiously. Often in such cases estimates were simply reported without any claims as to statistical significance.

Terms used in this report have been provided at the end of this document in a glossary. The first time a word that is defined in the glossary is used in each chapter, it is shown in italics.

For More Information

This report is intended to provide a broad cross-section of the most relevant trend data in the lives of children and adolescents in America. For those interested in more detailed information, a number of additional resources, both print and electronic, are available. If you would like to investigate a topic further, please use the abbreviated footnote reference to find the full citation located in the bibliography. A few of these resources are listed below, by topic area. They should provide the reader with a starting point when searching for additional information in these areas.

Section 1: Population, Family, and Neighborhood

U.S. Census Bureau. It is possible to access nearly all Census Bureau publications, such as the *Current Population Reports*, from the Bureau's web page, www.census.gov. It is also possible to extract data directly from public use census files using the Federal Electronic Research and Review Extraction Tool (FERRET) available at <http://www.ferret.bls.census.gov>. FERRET allows the user to:

- Create crosstabs;
- Create frequencies;
- Create a SAS data set for downloading; and
- Create an ASCII output file where it is possible to either download the file or transfer the data into a spreadsheet.

Section 2: Economic Security

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). As part of the Department of Health and Human Services, ASPE will soon publish a report on *Trends in the Economic Well-Being of Low-Income Americans*. This report will show trends in income, poverty, and other economic measures, such as access to health insurance and food security, with explanatory text.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau of Labor Statistics produces a variety of employment data and can be found on the web at <http://www.bls.gov/>.

Section 3: Health Conditions and Health Care

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducts many data collection efforts, including the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), which monitors health-risk behaviors among youth and young adults. The categories include: 1) tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, 2) sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, 3) unhealthy dietary behaviors, and 4) physical inactivity. This information can be accessed via CDC's main web page, located at <http://www.cdc.gov/>.

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The National Center for Health Statistics publishes a number of reports that provide data on the health of children and youth in the United States. Some of these include the *National Vital Statistics Reports* and

the *Vital and Health Statistics* series. These reports and many others are available at the NCHS web site <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>. Additional NCHS data are available through the Census' FERRET system at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh/ferret/ferret.htm>. Currently, the 1994 Underlying Cause-of-Death File, the 1993 National Health Interview Survey, and the third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, NHANES III, are all available via FERRET.

Section 4: Social Development, Behavioral Health, and Teen Fertility

Bureau of Justice Statistics. Detailed information on juvenile offenders can be obtained at the Bureau of Justice Statistics' main web site, located at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>.

Institute for Social Research. This institute has collected information on the behaviors, attitudes, and values of American secondary school students, college students, and young adults since 1975 in its Monitoring the Future survey. Information and data from this study are available online at <http://monitoringthefuture.org/>.

Section 5: Education and Achievement

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES is the primary federal agency for collecting and analyzing data that are related to education in the United States. Its web site is located at <http://nces.ed.gov/> and contains links to its many data collection activities. These surveys include the Common Core of Data (CCD), the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), the Private School Universe Survey, and the National Household Education Survey (NHES). In addition, NCES collects and reports on the academic performance of the nation's students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is NCES' primary assessment of what American elementary and secondary students know and can do in a variety of academic subjects.

Last, additional information can be found in our sister report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2001*, which is available online at <http://childstats.gov/ac2001/ac01.asp>.