

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

# 1998



Part one of this document was produced by Child Trends, Inc.  
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# Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children & Youth

# PART 1



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by Child Trends, Inc.

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## **PART TWO: THE WELL-BEING OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN, NATIVE-BORN CHILDREN WITH IMMIGRANT PARENTS, AND NATIVE-BORN CHILDREN WITH NATIVE-BORN PARENTS**

By Donald J. Hernandez and Kathryn Darke

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In addition, researchers from the Family and Child Research Network of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development conducted original analyses for this report in order to produce indicators in areas with particular need of data development. We especially thank Dr. Randal Day of the University of Washington and Anne Driscoll of Child Trends, Inc. for a number of new measures they produced for this report.

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This report was produced under contract by Child Trends, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to studying children, youth, and families through research, data collection, and data analyses. Brett Brown served as project director and Gretchen Kirby served as project manager. Individual sections of this report were headed by Child Trends staff as follows: Brett Brown, Population, Family, and Neighborhood; Richard Wertheimer, Economic Security; Gretchen Kirby, Health Conditions and Health Care; Martha Steketee, Social Development, Behavioral Health, and Teen Fertility; and Tamara Halle, Education and Achievement. Research assistance was provided by Michelle Harper and Nehal Patel. Production assistance was provided by Fanette Jones and Carla Butler. Editorial reviews were completed by Scott Forrey and other staff of the Urban Institute Press. In addition, Kris Moore and Carol Emig made many substantive and editorial contributions throughout the development of this report.



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## INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

This is the third 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 90 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 1990s. In a few cases, data for earlier years are also presented, as are projections into the 21st century.

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 including 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).

Important indicators have been added for this third edition based on recommendations from the staff of statistical agencies that are participating in the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, described below. Additional indicators have been added based on the work of researchers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the Family and Child Research Network who have developed new indicators from existing data sources.

### **New indicators for this edition of the report include:**

- Fertility rate and number of births (PF 1.7)
- Food security (ES 4.2)
- Firearm-related deaths (HC 1.6)
- Children and adolescents with HIV/AIDS (HC 2.13)
- Closeness with parents (SD 1.8)
- Parents' activities with children (SD 1.9)
- Sufficient hours of sleep (SD 2.5)

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## HIGHLIGHTS ON YOUTH

This report is intended to help readers develop a sense of how children and youth are faring overall. As an example, we offer below a selection of findings from the report that relate to the experience of teenagers.

- The overall teen birth rate for 15 to 19-year-old women has been dropping since 1991. Black teens have experienced the largest drop during that time period.
- Use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine by high school students has increased during the 1990s, following periods of decreasing use during the previous decade. Estimates for 1997, however, indicate that illicit drug use has leveled off and smoking has declined among younger teens (in the 8th grade).
- Following years of increase, the violent crime arrest rate for male youth ages 10 through 17 declined substantially between 1994 and 1996.
- Seventeen-year-old students have made modest gains in mathematics and science proficiency since the early 1980s.
- The mortality rate for black youth ages 15 through 19 has declined substantially since 1994, following dramatic increases that began in the late 1980s. Rates for 1996 are still 40 percent above 1985 levels, however.
- Receipt of early prenatal care by teen mothers has increased steadily during the 1990s.

## 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, though 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. Reliable indicators of child homelessness also need to be developed.

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 that can be used to track the well-being of children at the state and local levels are much less plentiful than at the national level. As state and local governments take on increasing levels of responsibility for the design and implementation of all sorts 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 level.

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## FEDERAL INTERAGENCY FORUM ON CHILD AND FAMILY STATISTICS

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 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. This forum, created in 1995, 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 NICHD Family and Child Research Network to develop new indicators related to fathering and male fertility and incorporating them into federal surveys where appropriate. Several indicators developed through this effort are included in this year's report (See SD 1.8 *closeness with parents*, and SD 1.9 *parent's activities with children*). 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 or always statistically 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 many cases. When such tests were not available, small 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 which were in fact higher or lower.

Finally, the user should note that in all tables and figures, unless otherwise clearly specified, race-specific estimates (e.g., white, black, Native American, Asian) include Hispanics of those races even when a separate estimate is given for Hispanics. In cases where Hispanics have been separated, "non-Hispanic" will follow the race designation as in "white, non-Hispanic." By contrast, in the textual descriptions of the data, races are in most cases referred to simply as white, black, Native American, or Asian, whether or not they include Hispanics.