



FOUNDATION *for*
CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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**FIRST REPORT TO MEASURE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF AMERICAN
CHILDREN IN FIRST DECADE OF LIFE FINDS STEADY IMPROVEMENT
FROM 1994 TO 2006**

**Foundation for Child Development report finds encouraging declines in
infant/childhood deaths and lead poisoning,
but also cites troubling trends**

WASHINGTON, DC – The first comprehensive report on the overall health, well-being and quality of life of America’s youngest children -- from birth through eleven years old – will be released April 24th by the Foundation for Child Development (FCD). The Special Focus Report, “Trends in Infancy/Early Childhood and Middle Childhood Well-Being, 1994-2006,” presents the first wide-ranging picture of how children in their first decade of life are faring in the United States, and is the first to track and compare child well-being across three primary stages of development – early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence.

“It is vitally important to invest in young children right from the starting gate. Recent research has made very clear that this is the key to preparing children on the path to success throughout their lives,” said Kenneth Land, project coordinator of the Child Well-Being Index, and a sociology professor and director of Duke University’s Center for Population Health and Aging. “We designed this report to answer the fundamental questions: ‘How well are our youngest children doing?’ And, ‘Are we doing all that we should to better their quality of life and set the groundwork for future success?’”

Key findings from the report include:

- **Overall improvements in the well-being index are reflected across all age groups** – infant/early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence. Each age group follows very similar positive trends across this time period.
- **The Health Domain overall is on a dramatic decline, dragged down by rising obesity rates and the number of babies born at low birth weight.** Research has linked the latter to an increase in delayed childbearing among women and the use of fertility drugs that make multiple births with lower birth weights more likely.

The prevalence of obesity among children 6-11 is nearly four times what it was in the 1960s; for children 2-5, it is three times more.

- **Some areas of health show steady improvement**, driven by declining infant and child death rates (attributed to better prenatal and health care, nutrition, and seat-belt laws), rates of mothers smoking during pregnancy, blood lead poisoning and increased vaccinations.
- **Safety is on the rise**: The percentage of children age 6-11 who report feeling unsafe or fearful of attack or harm at school or to and from school is down. The rate of children aged 0-11 who are victims of homicide has decreased dramatically; for children aged 6-11, that number has been cut in half.
- **Family economic well-being is likely to decline in years ahead**. While this indicator has been holding steady, if trends in job loss, the housing finance crisis and rising inflation that have characterized 2007 to the present day persist, they are likely to drive down this key economic indicator for children of all ages.
- **Educational attainment also on the rise**: This domain is showing good progress driven by the dramatic increase in the number of children 4-6 enrolling in full-day kindergarten. What's more, the report found that more parents are reading to their children daily and setting rules for TV watching. Performance on standardized math and reading test scores among 9-year-olds has improved over the 12-year period.

“These findings drive home the critical balance between good policy and good parenting,” said Ruby Takanishi, president of the Foundation for Children Development. “When we insist on safety standards, whether it’s on the playground or in our homes, it has huge, measurable ripple effects in children’s lives. There’s every reason to believe policy can also play a role in reducing obesity, such as changing school lunch menus and supporting environments that encourage exercise.”

The Foundation for Child Development releases the “Child Well-Being Index” (CWI), each year, to measure the well being of children from birth to 17. While this index has shown an overall increase in children’s well-being over the past several years, dramatic improvements in the teen-specific areas of teen childbearing, alcohol and drug use drove FCD to question whether these trends were largely responsible for the overall positive tilt. They, therefore, commissioned this new “Special Focus” report to take a deeper look at the well-being of children specifically in early and middle childhood by looking at indicators specific to those age ranges. These indicators – such as rates of prenatal care, whether a parent had dinner with their child every day, whether children have TV rules, and whether they recognize all letters by age five – have not traditionally been part of the annual CWI.

Methodology

The 2008 Special Focus report on trends in infant/early and middle childhood well-being is an evidence-based measure of 25 key national indicators across six quality-of-life domains over the years 1994-2006. Data sources include the U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Education Statistics, and other vital statistics and sample surveys. The full report is available at: [web link here].

About the Foundation for Child Development

The Foundation for Child Development is a national private philanthropy dedicated to the principle that all families should have the social and material resources to raise their children to be healthy, educated, and productive members of their communities.

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