

Let's Talk About Poverty

THE URBAN POVERTY CONSORTIUM OF WATERLOO REGION

POVERTY FACT SHEET SERIES - FACT SHEET #6

NOVEMBER 20, 2000

“ In recognition of work done in the community related to poverty, the Urban Poverty Consortium seeks to build and extend new and existing efforts on poverty, to raise awareness, share information and data and to catalyze further action on poverty.”

Young and Poor

The gravest threat to Canada's future and to our quality of life is the problem of child poverty.¹

Child Poverty is Family Poverty

In this Fact Sheet Series, we have been looking at some subgroups of people in poverty. Another one of these specific groups is the children. Children living in poverty are those under the age of 18 living in families whose total income before taxes falls below the Statistics Canada Low-income Cut-off.² A family at or below LICO is one which spends more than 55% of its income on food, clothing and shelter. (See Table One for LICO cutoffs in Waterloo Region.) We need to remember that *child poverty is ALWAYS family poverty.*³

Table One
Low Income Cut-offs for Waterloo Region

Family Size	Monthly	Annual
1 person	\$1,244	\$14,694
2 persons	\$1,555	\$18,367
3 persons	\$1,934	\$22,844
4 persons	\$2,342	\$27,650
5 persons	\$2,617	\$30,910
6 persons	\$2,893	\$34,168

Source: Statistics Canada, *Low Income Cut-offs*, Cat.No.13-551-XPB, January, 1997

Poverty of children is increasing

Child poverty rates remain high while the number of poor children in Canada dropped slightly between 1996 and 1997, there are still 50% more poor children today than there were ten years ago.⁴

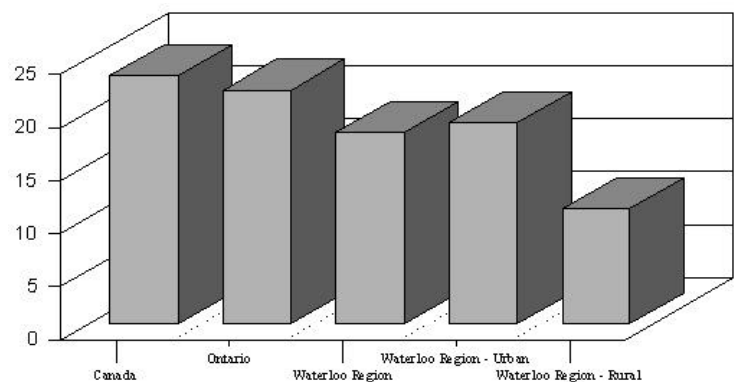
Poverty is:

- *feeling ashamed when my dad can't get a job*
- *sometimes really hard because my mom gets scared and she cries*
- *hearing my mom and dad fight over money*
- *being afraid to tell your mom that you need gym shoes*

Grade 4 and 5 children⁵

About 1.5 million Canadian children live in poverty, and the number of poor children has increased by a half a million since 1989, when the House of Commons resolved to eliminate poverty by the year 2000. One in five Canadian children (19.8%) was poor in 1997. In fact, Canada's children are more likely to live in poverty than Canadians in any other age group, and the rate of poverty is highest among children under the age of 6 years (25%).⁶

Table 2: Poverty Rates for Children, in Canada, Ontario & Waterloo Region, 1996



Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 (custom tabulations). Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics at the Canadian Council on Social Development.

As can be seen in Table 2, the rates of child poverty in Waterloo Region are lower than in Canada generally and in the whole of Ontario. But almost one in five children in the Region of Waterloo lives in poverty. Child poverty is also much higher in the urban parts of the Region, which is the common pattern across Canada. One explanation for this urban-rural difference is that the greater availability in cities of support services used by poor households may influence where they live.⁷

Poverty is:

- *pretending that you forgot your lunch*
 - *not ever getting a pet because it costs too much*
 - *being teased for the way you are dressed.*
- Grade 4 and 5 children⁸*

Poor Children

According to Statistics Canada, most low-income children live in a family that includes two parents, one or two children under 18 years, and is led by an adult in his late 30s who has graduated from high school. In general, poor families live in larger communities, live in rental accommodations and receive most of their income from work or work and social assistance. Even though the majority of poor children live with two parents, children are more likely to be poor if they live in a lone parent family.

Children from families with higher income can easily slide into poverty because parent(s) lose a job, have to leave work or training because of a lack of child care, or do not receive support from a non-custodial parent.

Characteristics of poverty that affect children

Poverty brings with it many costs that have a long term influence on children:

- **Poor nutrition, hunger**
- **Family stress, parental depression, reduced supports and family conflict**
- **Fewer resources for learning, lower quality child care, financial barriers for activities**
- **Crowded and dilapidated housing problems, homelessness, problem neighbourhoods, frequent moves, lack of safe places to play**

Poverty and Child Development Outcomes

Poverty plays a crucial role in the development of a child's potential and a child's future, perhaps more so than all other factors combined.¹⁰ Poverty does not harm all children, but it does put them at greater developmental risk, through the direct physical consequences of deprivation, the indirect consequences of severe stress on the parent-child relationship, and the stigma attached to being poor. Let's take a look at some specific outcomes of poverty on children's development:

Health and physical development:

Poverty is:

- *getting a basket from the Santa Fund*
 - *hiding your feet so the teacher won't get cross when you don't have boots*
 - *not getting a hot dog on hot dog day*
- Grade 4 and 5 children*

Children living in poverty are more likely to:

- have low birth weights
- be born with birth defects
- develop developmental disabilities
- die as babies or young children
- have general health problems
- grow more slowly
- have decayed and unfilled teeth and
- have problems with

Behaviour:

Poverty is:

- *wishing you could go to McDonald's*
 - *not being able to take swimming lessons*
 - *being teased for the way you are dressed*
- Grade 4 and 5 children¹¹*

Poverty has an overall effect on children's emotional and behavioural development, and children from low-income families are much more likely than children from families with higher incomes to suffer from high levels of anxiety.¹²

Children who experience poverty have higher rates of aggressiveness (such as starting fights) and hyperactivity, and they are less accepted by their peers. Poverty is associated with low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence for children. Many children living in poverty are told that they are “no-good, inadequate, dirty, incompetent and stupid,” so they may begin to expect failure of themselves, just as the world expects it of them.

These children participate less in sports and extra curricular activities and have fewer friends and social contacts.

Learning and Education:

It's hard to focus on school when you are worrying about survival — things like how to get home from school safely and how we're going to eat that night. . . . I had to start working when I was 10. My whole life focus was not on learning. It was staying alive. I had 2 or 3 jobs, from cutting grass to working in a janitorial service. That was not saving for a bicycle bit to help to pay for rent and food. The bills don't stop coming in because you're poor. They have to get paid. I couldn't sit back and complain. But having to get up the next morning to go to school was hard.¹³

Poverty has a negative influence on learning. In comparison with other children, children living in poverty have

- lower IQ levels,
- lower math and reading abilities,
- shorter attention spans,
- greater speech delays and vocabulary limitations.



Poverty during childhood is related to poor intellectual outcomes and general learning or overall educational attainment. This means

- lower average grades,
- fewer years of education,
- lower rates of going to college or university, and
- lower adult productivity (as measured by annual earnings, wages and work hours).

Children who live in low-income families also rarely participate in organized sports, clubs or community groups, and so miss out on the learning through instruction and mentoring by group leaders.¹⁴

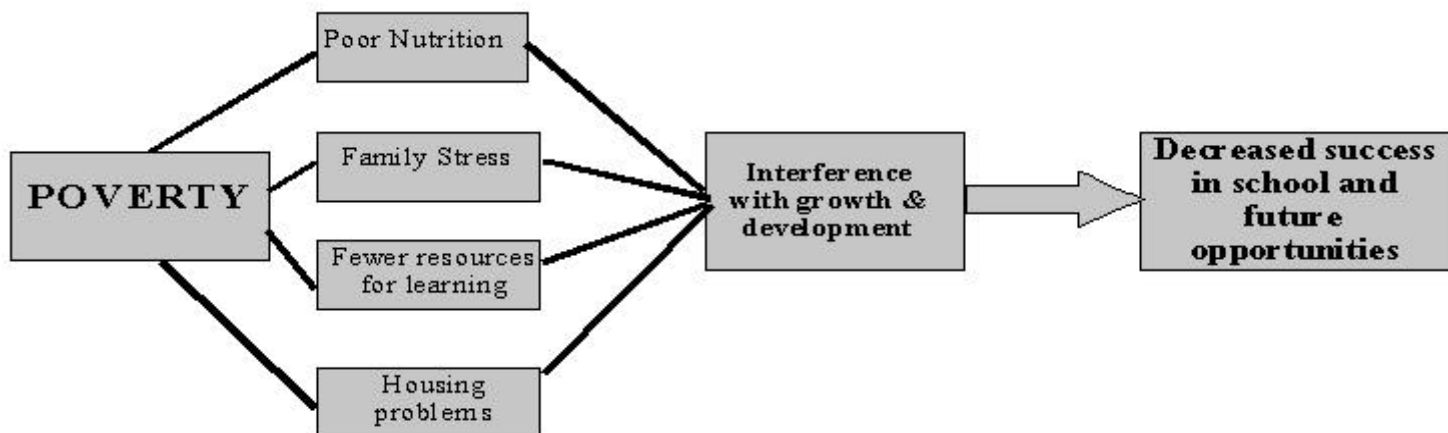
The research shows that as families move up the ladder at all levels, opportunity increases. Poverty is about inequality, and it's the inequality, not absolute poverty, that exerts a powerful influence on a child's life-chances.

So What?

A few points to ponder:

- Discussion about child and family poverty in Canada really is about how to equalize life chances for children.
- Income inequality has worsened in the last 25 years for families with children, and the capacity of many families to earn enough money to provide reasonable opportunities for their children to develop is very limited.

Figure 3: Summary of Effects of Poverty on Children



- According to the National Council of Welfare, only \$7.4 billion would bring all families in Canada up to the poverty line.
- According to David Ross, former Executive Director of the Canadian Council on Social Development, the neglect of families and children should first and foremost be considered a moral, not an economic issue. He raises the concern that today morality seems to have lost political appeal.
- Canada's child poverty rate is substantially higher—often two-to-three times higher—than that of most other major Western industrialized nations. For example, both Sweden and France have child poverty rates less than half of the rate in Canada.¹⁵

Through the fall and winter of 2000, the Urban Poverty Consortium will be releasing additional poverty fact sheets on the following topics:

- T Youth
- T Lone Parents

Previous poverty fact sheets have covered the following topics and are available by contacting members of the Urban Poverty Consortium:

- T The Poverty Gap
- T New Canadians
- T Persons with Disabilities
- T Seniors
- T The Working Poor

End Notes:

1. David Ross, Katherine Scott and Mark Kelly (1996). *Child Poverty: What are the Consequences?* Canadian Council on Social Development
2. *Ibid.*
3. David Ross, Katherine Scott & Mark Kelly (1996). *Child Poverty: What are the Consequences?* Canadian Council on Social Development.
4. Canadian Council on Social Development. (2000) *The Progress of Canada's Children into the Millennium.*
5. *Our Neighbours' Voices: Will We Listen?.* The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, 1998.
6. Campaign 2000. *Report Card 2000.*
7. Kevin K. Lee (2000). *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile.* Canadian Council on Social Development.
8. *Our Neighbours' Voices: Will We Listen?.* The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, 1998.
9. Adapted from David Ross and Paul Roberts (1999). *Income and Child Well-being: A new perspective on the poverty debate.* Canadian Council on Social Development and Arloc Sherman (1997). *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America.* Children's Defense Fund.
10. David Ross and Paul Roberts (1999). *Income and Child Well-being: A new perspective on the poverty debate.* Canadian Council on Social Development.
11. *Our Neighbours' Voices: Will We Listen?.* The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, 1998.
12. Ross and Roberts (1999)
13. Arloc Sherman (1997). *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America.* Children's Defense Fund.
14. Ross and Roberts (1999).
15. David Ross, Katherine Scott & Peter Smith (2000). *The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty.* Canadian Council on Social Development.

~ For More Information ~

Contact the Members of the Urban Poverty Consortium of Waterloo Region:

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Resources and Initiatives - Fact Sheet #6

The following is a listing of some of the community resources available to people living in poverty in Waterloo Region. Please contact them for additional information on their various programs and services. Many of the community agencies operate through the efforts of their volunteers and welcome your support. In order to obtain information about other services in Waterloo Region, please call:

Community Information Waterloo Region - (519) 579-3800

Information Cambridge - (519) 740-3030

Woolwich Community Information Centre - (519) 669-5139/1-800-661-7918

Child Care Subsidy Program

Region of Waterloo Social Services Department
Child Care Division
99 Regina Street South, 5th Floor
Waterloo N2J 4G6
Tel: (519) 883-2200 Fax: (519)883-2234

Children's Needs Distribution Centre

Highland Baptist Church
135 Highland Road West
Kitchener N2M 3B9
Tel: (519) 745-9461

Campaign 2000

c/o Family Service Association of Toronto
355 Church Street
Toronto, Ont. M5B 1Z8
Telephone:(416) 595-9230, Ext. 244 Fax:(416) 595-0242
liyugu@fsatoronto.com

Human Resource Development Canada

Income Security Programs
409 Weber Street West
Kitchener ON N7M 6B2
Tel.: 1 - 800 - 277 - 9914 TTY: 1 - 800 - 255 - 4786

Here is a list of Family Resource Centres in Waterloo Region partially funded by the Region. See the *Bluebook Directory of Community Services* for a complete list of neighbourhood resource centres and parent and child programs. The *Bluebook* is available at libraries, Community Information Centres, Social Planning Councils and other social agencies.

Kitchener-Waterloo YMCA

Debbie Hoekstra, Manager, Community Children Services
333 Carwood Avenue
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3C5
Tel: 743-5201 Fax: 743-5204

Langs Farm Village Association

William Davidson Executive Director
887 Langs Drive, Unit 1
Cambridge, Ontario N3H 5K4
Tel: 653-1470 EXT.236 Fax:653-1285

Wilmot Family Resource Centre Inc.

Trisha Robinson, Administrative Coordinator
P.O. Box 1300, 175 Waterloo St
New Hamburg, Ontario N0B 2G0
Tel: 662-2731 Fax: 662-2158

Woolwich Community Services

Don Harloff, Executive Director
73 Arthur Street South
Elmira, Ontario N3B 2M8
Tel: 669-5139 Fax: 669-4210

Our Place - The Family Enrichment House

Dorothy Snyder, Executive Director
800 King Street East
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 2M6
Tel: 571-1626 Fax: 571-1626

Waterloo Rural Child Care Resource Centre

Nancy Kyle, Program Coordinator
47 Northumberland Street, Unit #5
Ayr, Ontario N0B 1E0
Tel: 632-8615 Fax: 632-5084

Sunbeam Residential Development Centre

Shaune Lawton, Executive Director
2749 Kingsway Drive
Kitchener, Ontario N2C 1A7
Tel: 893-6200 Fax: 893-9034

Cambridge Family Resource Centre

Donna Kendrick Executive Director
63 Grand Avenue North
Cambridge, N1S 2L1
Tel: (519)740-8353 Fax: (519)740-8353

Highland Stirling Community Group

Kimberley Grobbeck, Coordinator
216 Mill Street
Kitchener, Ontario N2M 3R2
Tel:745-9408 Fax: 741-2642

