



DEVELOPMENTS

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Vol. 4, No. 1

Spring, 1999

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INVESTING IN CHILDREN: A NATIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE, 1998

MINISTER OPENS SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE!

The Honourable **Pierre S. Pettigrew**, Minister of Human Resources Development Canada, delivered the opening address at our October conference. The enthusiastic crowd of over 350 people included 55 from municipalities or community organizations, 87 from non-governmental organizations, 43 from provincial/territorial governments, 62 from universities/colleges, and 77 from federal departments.

Speakers including eminent researcher **Emmy Werner** and noted author **Sylvia Ann Hewlett** captured the audience's attention.

A series of eight workshops were held where research papers were presented and discussions on the application of the findings took place. The papers addressed issues of family structure, parenting and work, school, community influences, child health, vulnerable populations, childhood experiences, and problem behaviour. See the NLSCY web site for copies of the research papers.

Lively discussions in the workshops generated numerous ideas on how the findings could be put into practice and guide policy. Turn the page for a sampling of these ideas.





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ISSUES & DEBATES FROM THE CONFERENCE!

FINDINGS:

- Pre-schoolers' vocabulary skills seem to be unaffected by whether their mothers choose to work or stay at home full-time. The amount of time a mother reads to her child has more influence.
- In the late elementary years, both boys and girls are doing well in school, feel good about themselves and school, and feel that their parents and teachers are supportive.
- 23.7% of Canadian mothers smoke at some point during their pregnancy, increasing their risk of giving birth to a low birth weight infant by one and a half times.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

- More resources and child-friendly workplace policies would allow parents to spend more time with their children encouraging development. Good quality day care can also promote children's development.
- Engaging the whole community – children, parents, teachers, and others – creates an environment conducive to learning. Better partnerships between the community and the school could benefit all.
- Emphasis must be placed on finding effective anti-smoking strategies to prevent young women from starting to smoke and provide support to help women quit early in their pregnancies.



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FINDINGS:

- Children's participation in the arts or unsupervised sports will decrease their risk of having one or more behavioural problems by 31% and 22% respectively. Participation rates are lower for kids in very poor families.
- For the ages of 4 – 11, approximately 14% of boys and 9% of girls bully other children while 5% of boys and 7% of girls are victimized.
- 30% of new immigrant children live in poverty, which is more than double the 13% of children living in poverty in the national population. However, this may be a transient condition related to resettlement for immigrant families, whereas for Canadian families it may be related to many other disadvantages harder to overcome.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

- Focus should be placed on decreasing barriers (such as user fees, costs of equipment and supplies, and stigmatization associated with subsidies) that can prevent children from participating in community programs and activities.
- Interventions for aggressive behaviour need to begin early, for example, through community nurses and school programs.
- There is a need for comprehensive, co-ordinated education, training, employment, childcare, and income support for families living in poverty. This is especially true for new immigrant families.

SOME CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES



Minister Pettigrew, opening the conference; other panel members (from left to right) are: then HRDC Deputy Minister Mel Cappe, Allen Zeesman of HRDC and Ivan Fellegi, Chief Statistician of Canada.

Keynote speaker Emmy Werner, University of California at Davis.





Informal discussion: (from left to right) Diane Watts, REAL Women; Maria Conti, Regional Representative of Kids First; and Cathy Perri, President of Kids First Parent Association of Canada



Workshop on School: (At the table from left to right) Delaney Tuner, CCSD and Doug Drew, Statistics Canada. (Front row from left to right) Bruce Ryan, University of Guelph, Clyde Hertzman, University of British Columbia and Wayne Doggett, Nova Scotia Education. (End of second row) Jan Eastman, Canadian Teacher's Federation.

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CONFERENCE GETS MEDIA COVERAGE ACROSS CANADA!

New research based on NLSCY data was presented at the conference.

Here's what major newspapers across Canada had to say:

- *"A major study has found the children of working mothers score about the same on behavioural, math and reading tests as those with mothers who stay at home. When it comes to parenting, quality outscores quantity."* **(National Post)**
- *"Parenting style matters more than income: study. Unique research surveyed more than 20,000 families across Canada."* **(Globe and Mail)**
- *"Study on poverty challenges accepted wisdom: a child's future is affected more by upbringing than by family income"* **(Le Devoir)**
- *". . . programs fostering better schools, supportive neighbourhoods and better parenting could make all the difference in the life of a poverty-stricken child."* **(Winnipeg Free Press)**



- *"14.5% of children who live below StatCan's low-income cutoffs – or 300,000 children – have behaviour problems, compared to only 9% of children who are not poor."* **(Toronto Star)**
- *"Parenting skills outweigh income for children: study."* **(Saskatoon Star-Phoenix)**
- *"Children who stayed in the lower-income quartile from 1994 to 1996 were three times more likely to repeat a grade than other children. Still, even among those children in the lowest-income quartile in both years, 94% did not repeat a grade."* **(Vancouver Sun)**

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UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS!

➤ SPECIAL EDITION BULLETIN

A synthesis of the conference research will be published in a special edition of the Applied Research Bulletin for the spring of 1999. This will feature highlights from papers presented at the conference. Keep an eye out for this publication!

➤ CONFERENCE REPORT

The goal of the conference was to promote action based on research. Later this spring HRDC will publish a final conference report, "Ideas for Action," summarizing the workshop discussions. This is intended to stimulate further policy dialogue on what steps can be taken by professionals, communities, and organizations across all sectors. Each chapter will include a statement of the issue in context, a synthesis of the research presented and a summary of the ideas discussed at each workshop, clustered by theme. As well, a concluding chapter will discuss the importance of taking action.

➤ VULNERABLE CHILDREN

We are awaiting the publication of "Vulnerable Children" edited by J. Douglas Willms. Using data collected in the first cycle of the NLSCY, the volume will explore the relationships between parents' socio-economic status and a range of physical, emotional, behavioural, social and cognitive outcomes in Canadian children aged 0-11 years.



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THE RESEARCH CONTINUES!

➤ Measuring Vulnerability

It has always been hard to identify children who, because of their childhood situations, experience difficulty later in life. At our fall conference, Doug Willms discussed these vulnerable children. By vulnerable, he meant that they were experiencing a learning or behavioural problem severe enough to warrant intervention. Depending on how this is measured, the number of vulnerable children in Canada could vary between 26% and 30%.

Many things can have an impact on vulnerability and these circumstances can come from anywhere in the child's life. For example:

- A child born with a genetic disease may not develop physically at the same rate as his/her peers.
- Problem behaviour may be related to a parent who is not warm and caring.
- Poor school performance may be related to a spell of poverty experienced after a parent's job loss.
- A positive school attitude in a child may be related to a teacher who is ready to help when the child asks.

At this point, we know quite a bit about the risk factors associated with vulnerability. However, we know much less about the way factors interact and change over time.

As a consequence of being vulnerable, children may experience future problems requiring action by families, communities, schools and governments.



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➤ Is Income Important?

The first Investing in Children Conference caused quite a stir when some newspapers reported that research on the NLSCY showed that income is not an important factor in child development outcomes. The conclusion is simply wrong.

The body of research presented at the conference confirmed the important and pervasive effects of income on child development. At the same time, the effects of income were weaker than many had anticipated and the reasons for that form the subject of this note.

The most important consideration is the likely underestimation of the effects of income when using cross-sectional data. For example, of the families that were poor in 1994, some were poor for long periods of time and some were only poor in that year. As we would expect the impact of one year of poverty on a child to be considerably smaller than the impact of sustained poverty, the use of cross-sectional data dilutes the effect of persistent poverty.

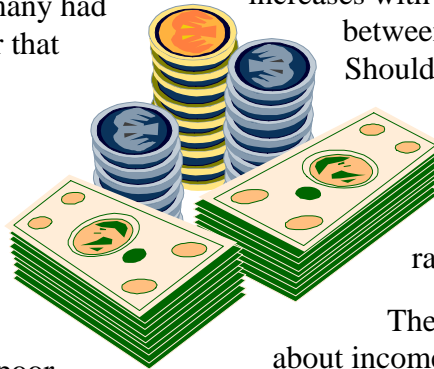
We also know that persistent poverty is a major problem for lone parents in particular. Other Applied Research Branch data has looked at lone parents who remained lone parents in every year from 1982 to 1993: 75% of those parents were poor in every year from 1982 to 1993.

As longitudinal patterns of income are captured by the survey, the effect of income should increase significantly. Note that this important effect may be even stronger if it also operates at higher levels of income (i.e. sustained high income has a positive effect on child outcomes).

Another consideration is the effect of income by age of the child. NLSCY research indicates quite clearly that the effect of income increases with the age of the child, at least between the ages of zero and eleven.

Should this pattern continue, as we expect it will, the importance of income will increase as the coverage of the NLSCY moves into the higher age ranges.

There is much more to be said about income and its importance. Given what we know about research all over the world, the idea that income is unimportant, particularly at lower income levels, is not plausible. Future research based on NLSCY data will address the more relevant question of understanding how and for whom income is important so that policy makers can better understand how to use income instruments appropriately in the overall policy mix to improve lives of children.





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NLSCY CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Work is underway on new areas of survey content for Cycle Four, and we are taking a hard look at existing measures to make sure they are giving solid results.

➤ **Adolescence: Transition to Adulthood**

In Cycle Four the oldest subjects in the sample will be 16 and 17 years old. Since more than 5 per cent of youth in this age group are the head of their own household (1996 Survey of Consumer Finance) and most are entering the transition to adulthood, we thought it appropriate to redesign the survey so that the youth is the primary respondent. This will allow more information directly from the adolescent about the pressures and influences in their lives.

We still hope to gain some information from the parents and perhaps from teachers for those who are living in the parental home and attending school. This spring of 1999 we will be consulting with Canadian and international experts to find the best possible measures to assess the major outcomes and transitions that youth face in our society.

UPCOMING DATA COLLECTIONS & RELEASES

➤ **Cycle 2**

Spring 1999 - second release of data (master file available)

Fall 1999 - final release of data (master file available)

*NOTE: The date of release of the public file is to be announced.

➤ **Cycle 3**

Spring 1999 - completion of data collection

➤ **Cycle 4**

Spring/Summer 1999 - content development

Winter/Spring 2000- field test

Fall 2000 - nationwide collection of data begins



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➤ **Understanding the Early Years**

Work is progressing on the enhancement of the survey's ability to measure children's early development and learning, or "readiness to learn." We are looking at various direct assessments of children up to age six. These would supplement the objective data on receptive vocabulary provided by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the parent's report on the child, family, and neighbourhood.

An Applied Research Branch technical document on readiness to learn is now available. Titled, "**Readiness to Learn, Child Development and Learning Outcomes: Background**" (T-98-4E.a) it includes (a) "An Annotated Bibliography" that focuses on the definition of readiness to learn and conceptual models, (b) "Issues for the Development of the Measurement Instruments" that separately addresses the interrelated issues of policy development and data collection, and (c) "Framework for Data Collection and Research on Child Development and Learning," which presents a framework for analytical research.

A second document, "**Readiness to Learn: Potential Measures of Readiness to Learn**" (T-98-4E.b), is a set of charts of various direct assessments of children's development and learning.

For ordering information, please see p.16.

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RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS

➤ Longitudinal Research Proposals

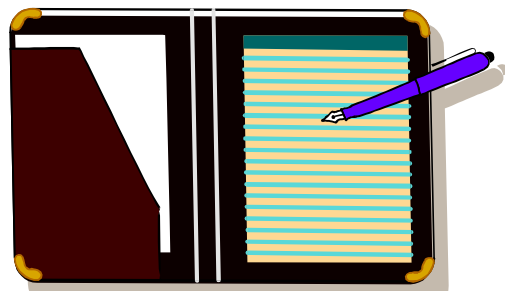
The Applied Research Branch is mandated to conduct a program of directed research based on the NLSCY. In addition to internal research, some of this work may be conducted at the behest of the department by academic researchers, consultants, non-governmental organizations, and other experts. The acceptance and selection of research proposals is expected to occur in the Spring of 1999. Priority will be given to proposals that are policy relevant. Information on the longitudinal research framework and on preparing proposals is on the NLSCY web site. Proposals can be sent to:

Satya Brink, Ph.D.
**Special Advisor, Income Security &
Social Development Applied Research
Branch**

360 Laurier Ave. W
Narano Building, 7th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0J9
satya.brink@spg.org

UPCOMING RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS !

- **Spring 1999** - Publication of the conference report "Ideas for Action"
 - Selection and acceptance of longitudinal research proposals
- **Year 2000** - Longitudinal research papers will be published



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THE CO-OP PROGRAM: EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Past issues of 'Developments' mentioned co-op students as part of the NLSCY Team. Students choose the Applied Research Branch because many opportunities are available to obtain practical knowledge in a research-based environment. Here is what two past students had to say about their terms at the Applied Research Branch.

**Lisa Milis, Department of Psychology,
Simon Fraser University, B.C.
Summer, 1998**

This past summer I had the chance to work as a member of the 'kids team'. With its focus on current social issues, it provided the perfect opportunity to apply some of what I've learned in university to the 'real world.' During my term at HRDC, I participated in a number of innovative and exciting projects, for instance, "Readiness to Learn" and the "NLSCY Survey." I encountered many inspirational individuals along the way, from Canadian and international researchers to other co-op students, that helped make it an exciting, eye opening, and (yes, sometimes) challenging four months! Thanks!

**Constance Maley, Department of Social
Work, Carleton University, Ottawa
Fall, 1998**

Completing a work placement with the Applied Research Branch of HRDC proved to be a great learning experience, as my work provided me with ample opportunity to enhance my research and project coordination skills. Working as part of the staff team was very enjoyable and project assignments were exciting, as tasks included participating in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth National Research Conference, coordinating a bilateral meeting, and writing an article for the Applied Research Bulletin. For students interested in enhancing their knowledge of research and policy, I would definitely recommend a work placement with ARB.



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INTERNET MANIA!

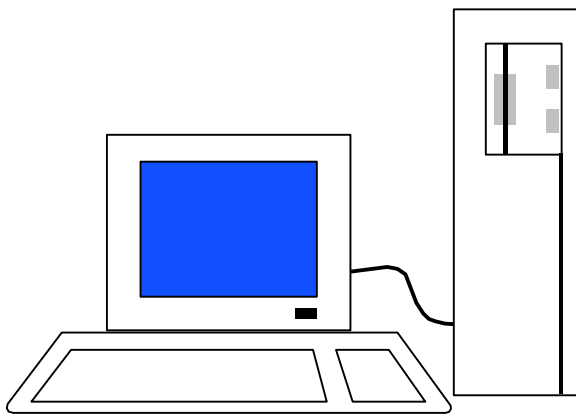
➤ CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!

www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/arb/conferences/nlscyconf/

- contains workshop papers and research papers from the conference
- request for proposals and the framework for the NLSCY research
- copy of the NLSCY Survey flyer which describes the survey

www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/arb/

- Applied Research Branch web site
- contains other research papers and publications



➤ SITES OF FURTHER INTEREST

www.canada.justice.gc.ca

- Department of Justice Canada web site

www.hcsc.gc.ca/hppb/childhood-youth/

- Health Canada Childhood and Youth web site

www.ccsd.ca

- official web site of the Canadian Council of Social Development

www.tnpc.com

- the web site of The National Parenting Center in the U.S.

www.childstats.gov

- official web site of the U.S. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

www.jcpr.org/wpseries.html

- Joint Center for Poverty Research, Northwestern University and University of Chicago web site

www.futureofchildren.org/index.htm

- official web site of The Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Los Altos, CA

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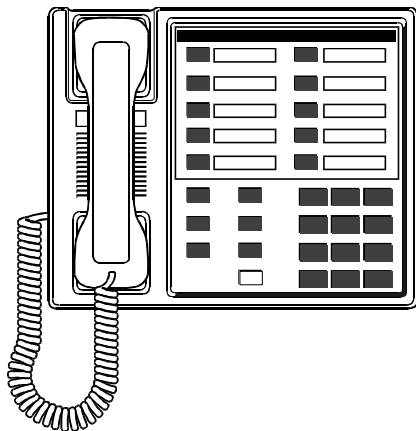
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NLSCY PROJECT TEAM

Team members include Allen Zeesman, Satya Brink, Susan McKellar, Liz Nieman, Cindy Cook, Tony Haddad, and Sarah Connor, as well as those who work with us on the project at Statistics Canada. We would like to offer a warm welcome to Christina Norris who is with us for eight months, our new administrative assistant, Joëlle Picard, and our co-op students Allison Kates, Sabrina Martelli, Sidney McLean, and François St-Onge.



WHERE TO DIRECT YOUR REQUESTS?

In an attempt to balance the workload and also to try to ensure some continuity, we are asking people to direct requests to a specific member of our team. We have divided this according to the type of organization that you work in.

Non-governmental organizations and consultants	Cindy Cook 946-5719 cindy.cook@spg.org
Provincial government	Liz Nieman 946-5717 liz.nieman@spg.org
Federal government and international issues	Sarah Connor 946-5725 sarah.connor@spg.org
Research institutes and universities	Tony Haddad 946-5728 tony.haddad@spg.org
Media or other	Susan McKellar 946-5716 susan.mckellar@spg.org



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WE'VE MOVED!

For the next several months, the NLSCY Team is located at:

360 Laurier Ave. W.
Narano Building, 7th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0J9

The Applied Research Branch, Human Resources Development Canada, produces "Developments". The following publications are available:

- Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 questionnaires (can also be acquired on the Internet at www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/freepub.cgi)
- additional copies of the newsletters (also obtainable on the Internet at www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/arb/publications/nlscy/nlscy_e.shtml)

From NLSCY Coordinator, Susan McKellar at:

Tel: (613) 946-5716

Fax: (613) 946-5283

susan.mckellar@spg.org

ORDERING INFORMATION

For hard copies of the following publications:

- Investing in Children conference research papers (listed on our web site)
- Applied Research Bulletins*
- technical paper *Readiness to Learn, Child Development and Learning Outcomes: Background*
- technical paper *Readiness to Learn, Child Development and Learning: Potential Measures of Readiness to Learn*

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