

# GIRL-CHILD



The *Beijing Platform for Action* (PfA) identifies the “persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl-child” as a critical area of concern. The PfA contains strategic objectives and actions to: eliminate discrimination against girls, including in education, training, health and nutrition; eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices; promote and protect rights; eliminate economic exploitation; eradicate violence; promote participation in social, economic and political life; and, strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child.

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## PATTERNS AND TRENDS\*

- Girls comprised 48.7% of Canada’s population under 15 years of age in 2002.
- Birth rates for girls 15 -19 years decreased from 25/1,000 in 1995 to 17.3 /1,000 in 2000.
- The average age of first marriage for women was 28 years of age in 1997, up from 25 years in 1987.
- Young women had a lower high school drop out rate at 9% than young men’s rate of 15% in 2002.<sup>1</sup>
- 26% of girls in grades 7 to 12 reported being discriminated against on the basis of gender, compared to 7% of boys (2002).
- 35% of girls in grades 6, 8 and 10 reported bullying in 1998, up from 29% in 1994.
- 61% of sexual offences reported to police in 2002 involved children and youth under 18 years old; approximately 85% of these victims were girls.
- Girls were the victims in almost 80% of cases of assault in which the perpetrator was a family member (1998).

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## TOWARDS EQUALITY

In Canada, measures related to the girl-child are often integrated into initiatives geared towards children or are addressed within policy areas such as those related to education, poverty or violence.

Further, many policy areas that affect children, such as education and health, fall within provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

Examples of federal efforts include:

- The Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) are programs that support children and parents to overcome difficulties that may limit opportunities in life. All the programs target at-risk families and provide parenting programs, food supplements, counselling and other services as appropriate.
- The federal government supported the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence to develop a national strategy to address violence prevention and the girl-child. An in-depth description of the research, its findings and recommendations are presented in the Alliance report entitled *In the Best Interests of the Girl-child* (January 2002).

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## RECENT INITIATIVES

- Canada released its declaration of commitment to children, *A Canada Fit for Children*,<sup>1</sup> in 2004, in response to the United Nations Special Session on Children. It is an action plan that reflects goals, strategies and opportunities on priorities within four central themes: supporting families and strengthening communities, promoting healthy lives, protecting from harm, and promoting education and learning.

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\* The source for data is Statistics Canada unless otherwise mentioned. Also, please note that *Women in Canada 2005: a gender-based statistical report* is being developed by Statistics Canada for publication in the fall of 2005.

<sup>i</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development 2002 *Highlights of the Progress of Canada's Children*.