The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile

FAMILIES IN CRISIS

he Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile, 3rd Edition, is based on a comprehensive review of national and provincial data sources and extensive consultation with experts from many fields. The CICH Profile contains ten chapters and 398 charts pertaining to the health and well-being of children and youth. It provides a relevant and clear picture of children today, and gives some direction for assisting them as they explore their futures.

Housing crises:

- Although provincial and national statistics are not available, it is clear that there are growing numbers of homeless families with children in cities across Canada. An estimated 19% of the homeless population in Toronto, or 5,300 people, are children.
- The reasons for using emergency shelters reflect pervasive problems in the social infrastructure.
 Important contributing factors are the high prevalence of poverty, the depth of poverty, the lack of employment opportunity, and the high cost of housing.
- The waiting lists for assisted housing in many Canadian cities highlight the housing crisis. In Toronto, 21,557 families with children were waiting for assisted housing in 1998. In Vancouver, 5,235 families with children were on the waiting list in 1998.
- The rate of poverty for children in Canada rose from 16% in 1981 to 20% in 1997. The rate of poverty for children in lone mother families has remained very high at 60%.
- Compared to children with permanent homes, homeless children face health risks, such as infection, obesity, anemia, injuries, burns, developmental delays and incomplete immunization.
- Compared to youth with permanent homes, homeless youth, often unaccompanied by an adult, are at elevated risk for injury, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems and pregnancy.
- The health issues of the homeless result from crowded, unstable living conditions, disrupted sleep, exposure to extreme temperatures, poor diet and lack of social support.

Food security:

- Hunger, defined as "the inability to obtain sufficient nutritious, personally acceptable food through normal food channels or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" is experienced by a small percentage of families in Canada.
- Aboriginal peoples are particularly at risk of hunger.
- Parents often go without so that their children can be fed. Parents are 7 times more likely to go without food than their children.
- Children, who represent approximately 27% of the population in Canada, account for between 31% and 54% of the food recipients at food banks across Canada.
- Food banks, intended to provide emergency food in times of occasional need, are not a long-term solution to the problem of food insecurity.

Witnessing and experiencing violence:

- On average, 18 women per 100,000 in Canada were admitted to shelters for reasons of abuse. Many of these women are mothers. Research suggests that children are aware of most violent incidents and than many even witness severe violence. Transition Home Survey.
- There can be serious, long-lasting negative effects on children who witness the abuse of their mother.
- An estimated 260,000 children aged 4-11 years (8%) had witnessed family violence.
- When compared to their peers who had not witnessed family violence, these children exhibited higher rates of indirect aggression (16% compared to 10%), property offences (16% compared to 9%), emotional disorders (19% compared to 12%) and conduct disorder (24% compared to 12%).
- Children who have witnessed family violence are also at elevated risk of depression, withdrawal, low selfesteem, aggressive behaviour and conflict with the law. In short, they have emotional and behavioural problems similar to those of abused children.

Missing children:

- Every year in Canada, 50,000 to 60,000 children are classified as missing. These children are not all newly missing; some of them may have been missing for years. The vast majority of missing children are classified as adolescent runaways. In 1998, 48,388 our of a total of 62,087 missing children were classified as adolescent runaways. In contrast, 42 missing children were classified as abducted by a stranger.
- The decision to run away is often precipitated by abuse or the child's perception of family dysfunction.
 Supporting families in the task of nurturing children and understanding adolescents is an important strategy for reducing the number of missing children.



For further information about the sources of the data, please refer to *The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile, 3rd Edition.* To order your copy of the *CICH Profile*, please contact:



Canadian Institute of Child Health 384 Bank Street, Suite 300 Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1Y4 Tel: (613) 230-8838 Fax: (613) 230-6654 E-mail: cich@cich.ca Internet: www.cich.ca