Poverty, Childhood Experiences & Well-being in BC

Kate Buium, Knowledge Broker, HELP
Dr. Martin Guhn, Professor & HELP Faculty
Adrienne Montani, Executive Director, First Call
Our work takes place on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the x̱w̓məθk̕ʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people
Outline

Welcome & Introduction

Dr. Martin Guhn, Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP, UBC)
- Social gradient
- BC Child Development Monitoring System data over 20 years

Adrienne Montani, Executive Director First Call
- Key highlights from BC Poverty Report Card 2023
- Successes
- Recommendations

Q&A Discussion
HELP was founded as a research centre dedicated to exploring “the differences that make a difference” in children’s early development.
Contexts Influencing Child Development
For two decades, BC’s child poverty rate hovered around 20-25% (1 in every 4 or 5 children) and was higher than the Canadian rate.
Recent Government Policy & Investment in Support of Children & Families

Federal

• Increases to *Canada Child Benefit* (2019, 2021)
• Extension of *parental leave* to 18 months (2019)
• *Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan* (2021); Bill-35
  An Act Respecting Early Learning and Child Care in Canada (2024)

2020-2022:
Federal & Provincial Pandemic Relief Programs
Recent Government Policy & Investment in Support of Children & Families

**Provincial**

- *Child Care B.C. Caring for Kids, Lifting Up Families* (2018)
- Ministry of Education and Child Care
During the COVID-19 pandemic, **Canada's** child poverty rate dropped by 40%. This progress was largely due to temporary pandemic benefits.

BC’s child poverty rate dropped from 1 in 5 to 1 in 8.

It seemed that things were headed in the right direction …
“My son’s asthma medication is not covered, and my disability cheques aren’t enough to make ends meet. I skip meals or have a slice of toast so that I can have money for my son’s needs.”

“My family takes transit. By the time I take my children to school and daycare in different locations, and then bus to work, it takes me about two hours. I’m spending four hours a day commuting on transit because there are no daycare spots available close to home or work.”

“The heat wasn’t working and overnight temperatures were near zero. My children had to sleep in my bed. It took two weeks for the landlord to replace the furnace. When your rent is below market value, you keep quiet and make yourself agreeable.”

“It is now impossible to buy all the provisions we need, so we buy the cheapest food and eat the same meals over and over. This is demeaning and not good for children’s health. Fresh foods are extremely expensive.”
Among the social determinants of health, **socioeconomic status is a fundamental determinant** that is intricately intertwined with other factors.

The life-long stepwise association between income and a range of children’s developmental health outcomes is so strong and consistent that it has been termed a “gradient effect” and serves as a powerful illustration of inequalities in children’s health and well-being within and between societies (Enns, Brownell, Janus, & Guhn, 2019).
Early Years Matter
The socioeconomic gradient in health

Inequalities in socioeconomic status are related to inequalities in population health.
The socioeconomic gradient in health

Life expectancy (years) for Canadian men, 2005, by income quintile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Lowest income quintile</th>
<th>Low</th>
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</table>
The socioeconomic gradient in health

Life expectancy (years) for Canadian men, 2005, by income quintile

- Lowest income quintile: 75.6
- Low: 77.8
- Medium: 78.7
- High: 79.1
- Highest income quintile: 80.3

5 years difference between the Lowest income quintile and the Highest income quintile.
Figure 2. Life Expectancy at Birth and Actual Individual Consumption per Capita, 2017

Source: International Comparison Program (2020), World Development Indicators (2020): the areas of the circles are proportional to population of each country
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**Diminishing return**
The effect of going from ‘having almost nothing’ to ‘having a little’ is more pronounced than going from ‘having enough’ to ‘more than enough’.
Child Development Monitoring System

**TDi**
- **Toddler Development Instrument**
- 1-2 Years
- Parent & caregiver questionnaire
- EARLY EXPERIENCES & CONTEXTS

**CHEQ**
- **Childhood Experiences Questionnaire**
- Start of kindergarten
- Parent & caregiver questionnaire
- EARLY EXPERIENCES & CONTEXTS

**EDI**
- **Early Development Instrument**
- Mid-kindergarten
- Teacher questionnaire
- SKILLS & COMPETENCES

**MDi**
- **Middle Years Development Instrument**
- Grades 4 - 8
- Student questionnaire
- WELL-BEING & ASSETS

**YDi**
- **Youth Development Instrument**
- Grades 10-12
- Student questionnaire
- WELL-BEING & ASSETS
New Data Dashboards
earlylearning.ubc.ca/reports/#data-dashboards
Overall Vulnerability, BC School Districts: Wave 8

32.9%

School District Range = 22% – 72%

Neighbourhood Range = 13% – 72%
Surrey EDI Wave 8 (2019-2022)
Neighbourhood Overall Vulnerability

Percent of Children in Low Income Families, Surrey 2019 (First Call Poverty Census Track Map)
Median Income vs EDI Vulnerability

- **temp_N_BREAK**
  - 200
  - 400
  - 600

- **colour_N_BREAK**
  - 200 or fewer records
  - 201-400 records
  - more than 400
EDI vulnerability (%) by caregiver-reported household income

- Under 50K: 45
- 50-100K: 30
- 100-150K: 25
- Over 150K: 20
When & how does the socioeconomic gradient emerge?
High cognitive score at 22 months of age

Low cognitive score at 22 months of age

Fair Society, Healthy Lives
High cognitive score at 22 months of age

Low cognitive score at 22 months of age

Fair Society, Healthy Lives

Note: Q = cognitive score
Source: 1970 British Cohort Study

High socioeconomic status
Low socioeconomic status
‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’

‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’

Linking Birth Factors and SES with Early Emotional Development and Mental Health

**Birth factors**
- APGAR score
- Preterm
- Caesarian section

**Socio-economic status**
- Poverty (subsidized MSP)
- Lone-parent household
- Neighborhood poverty

Higher likelihood of EDI vulnerability and mental health diagnosis

What links SES/income to outcomes?
Social Determinants of Health (e.g., income) → ? → Child development & well-being
Social Determinants of Health (e.g., income) → Daily experiences of children and families → Child development & well-being
Sensitive Periods in Early Brain Development

Graph developed by Council for Early Child Development (ref: Nash, 1997; Early Years Study, 1999; Shonkoff, 2000.)
Early brain development and pruning
Relationship between early experiences and later health outcomes.
The environments we create and the experiences we provide for young children and their families affect not just the developing brain, but also many other physiological systems, from cardiovascular function and immune responsiveness to metabolic regulation.

Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2020
THE LONG REACH OF EARLY EXPERIENCE...

2nd Decade
- School Failure
- Teen Pregnancy
- Criminality

3rd/4th Decade
- Obesity
- Elevated Blood Pressure
- Depression

5th/6th Decade
- Coronary Heart Disease
- Diabetes

Old Age
- Premature Aging
- Memory Loss
What are children’s day-to-day experiences in BC?
Income

in equality

childhood experiences
Child Development Monitoring System

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**EARLY EXPERIENCES & CONTEXTS**

**SKILLS & COMPETENCES**

**WELL-BEING & ASSETS**
Reading/telling stories
One or more times a day and income level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $20,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 or more</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading/telling stories
One or more times a day and income level

- Under $20,000
- $20,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 to $149,999
- $150,000 or more

~ $50,000 Poverty Line (Low Income Measure)
~ $100,000 Living Wage

2 parents, 2 children
Vancouver

~ $50,000
~ $100,000

Living Wage
Poverty Line
(Low Income Measure)
Water consumption more than once per day and income level

- Under $20,000
- $20,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 to $149,999
- $150,000 or more
Immunizations

Completed Recommended Immunizations and Income

Herd immunity

- Under $20,000
- $20,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 to $149,999
- $150,000 to $199,999
- $200,000 or more
Has your child ever had her/his teeth checked by a professional?
Reading Books/Telling Stories by Family Income
(Data 2017-2020)
Neighbourhood Support by Family Income (Data 2017-2020)

- Under $50k: 64%
- $50k to $75k: 65%
- $75k to $100k: 71%
- $100k to $150k: 77%
- $150k and over: 81%
Screen Time, 2+ hours/day by Family Income (Data 2017-2020)

- Under $50k: 55%
- $50k to $75k: 41%
- $75k to $100k: 31%
- $100k to $150k: 35%
- $150k and over: 32%
MDI Well-being Index, % *Thriving* by Census Family Income Quintiles (Data 2016-2018)

Grade 4

- Lowest Income: 41.3
- Second lowest Income: 41.0
- Middle Income: 41.6
- Second highest Income: 44.1
- Highest Income: 45.9
% Participation in Organized Activities by Census Family Income Quintiles (Data 2016-2018)

Grade 7

- Lowest Income: 69.8
- Second lowest Income: 72.6
- Middle Income: 73.5
- Second highest Income: 77.0
- Highest Income: 82.3
Income in equality childhood experiences
What do we do, as a society, with this evidence at hand?
Did you know that 1 in 7 kids in British Columbia lives in poverty?

First Call is working to change that.

Check out our recently released 2023 BC Child Poverty Report Card.
WHAT ARE SOME KEY FACTS FROM 2021?

- Child poverty is on the rise again, with the withdrawal of pandemic benefits.
- Reducing poverty for the 126,120 poor BC children needs urgent action.
- The income inequality gap is widening in BC.
- Children in lone-parent families have one of the highest risks of poverty at 40.4%.
One in Seven BC Children Living in Poverty

Child Poverty Rates, by Province/Territory, CFLIM After Tax, 2021

There has been some improvement...
BC rate lower than Canadian rate

Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2021 (2023)
One in Seven BC Children Living in Poverty

All-Ages, Child (0-17) and Young Children (0-5) Poverty Rates, BC and Canada, CFLIM After Tax, 2021

- **Young children (0-5 years) poverty rate**
  - BC: 37,010 young children, 13.8%
  - Canada: 369,160 young children, 16.1%

- **Child (0-17 years) poverty rate**
  - BC: 126,120 children, 14.3%
  - Canada: 1,162,460 children, 15.6%

- **All ages poverty rate**
  - BC: 754,360 people, 15.2%
  - Canada: 5,738,240 people, 15.5%

Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2021 and custom tabulations (2023)
It’s been 34 years since the House of Commons made a unanimous commitment to end child poverty by the year 2000. In 1989, the child poverty rate was 22.0% in Canada and 21.9% in BC. In 2003, BC’s child poverty rate reached a 30-year high at 27.6%.

Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 11-10-0018-01 (2023)
The overall child poverty statistics hide the fact that some children in BC are at greater risk of living in poverty than others.

### One in Seven BC Children Living in Poverty

#### BC Child (0-17) Poverty Rates (LIM-AT), Select Racialized Groups, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asian</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of select racialized groups</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not racialized</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistic Canada, Census of Population 2021, custom tabulations (2023)

### Child (0-17) poverty rate, 67 BC First Nations reserves, CFLIM-AT, 2021

- All 67 reserves with data available: 4,360 children (31%)
- Rural reserves (40 reserves): 2,300 children (35%)
- Urban (within CMA/CA) reserves (27 reserves): 2,060 children (27.5%)

Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table I-13, Individual Data, 2021 (2023)
In 2021, 80% of lone-parent families in BC were female-led. Their median incomes at $55,140/yr were 74% of the median incomes of male-led lone-parent families at $72,550/yr.

Poor lone-parent families were 5 ½ times more likely to be poor than couple families with children.
LOW WAGES AND PRECARIOUS WORK

Income Gaps for Parents Working Full-Time, Full-Year at BC’s Minimum Wage in 2021, Compared to LIM Before Tax, 2021

- **Lone parent with one child**
  - Actual minimum wage: $27,287
  - Before-tax poverty line: $44,631
  - Poverty gap: $17,344

- **Couple family with two children**
  - Actual minimum wage: $54,574
  - Before-tax poverty line: $63,118
  - Poverty gap: $8,544

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0232-01 Low-income measure (LIM) thresholds (2023)

“My family takes transit. By the time I take my children to school and daycare in different locations, and then bus to work, it takes me about two hours. I’m spending four hours a day commuting on transit because there are no daycare spots available close to home or work.” — Mother in a two-parent family with two young children
Welfare incomes for BC families, adjusted for inflation, went down in value in 2021. This was the first time they lost value after 6 years of steady gains.
These families would have had to earn from $1,030 to $1,165 more per month to reach the poverty line.

Depth of Low Income for Poor Families in British Columbia, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File, Table 11-10-0020-01 and T1FF Tech Reference Guide, Final Estimates, 2021 (2023)
Growing Income Inequality

BC Average After-Tax Family Income Shares, 2021

- Richest half of BC families' share: 74%
- Poorest half of BC families' share: 26%

Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family Files 2021 (2023)
Importance of Government Help: Public Policy Matters

Child Poverty Reduction by Government Transfer Payments, 2021

134,350 BC children were kept out of poverty in 2021 thanks to government help.

Source: Statistics Canada, Custom tabulation, data from T1 Family File, 2021 (2023)
Advocacy in Action
Advocacy Works!

2010  Living Wage Employer program starts: 350+ employers, impacting 30,000 + staff

2015  Elimination of the welfare clawback of child support: depth of poverty for 5,400+ children

2016  EI maternity/parental benefits fully exempt for people on IA/disability. Benefits 200+ parents/year

2018  BC Bill 39 Poverty Reduction Strategy Act: legislated target child poverty 50% within 5 years.
Advocacy Works!

2019  BC Family Benefit introduced: up to age 18, doubled amount, impacting all low-income families

2021  support for youth transitioning out of care, aiming to ensure youth no longer age out of care and into homelessness.

2021  Get on Board, children 12 and under can ride Translink free of charge
Universal child care is a key poverty reduction strategy
Repetingations: What Needs to Happen

25 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

TAX FAIRNESS AND INCOME SUPPORT
Minimum wages | Living wages | Welfare rates | Child benefits | EI reform | Tax reform

TARGETED INITIATIVES FOR GROUPS OVER-REPRESENTED IN POVERTY DATA
Indigenous communities | Newcomers | Youth from care | Kinship caregivers | Kids w/Disabilities

LOWER BARRIERS AND IMPROVE LIVES THROUGH UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS
Child care | Public health | Affordable housing | Public schools | School Meals | Post-Secondary
Public transit | Digital access | Expanded Health Care Coverage
Where is your influence for issues that matter to you?

**Election periods = opportunities to:**

- Raise public awareness
- Educate candidates
- Propose policy changes
- Seek commitments from parties and candidates
- Use election toolkits/materials produced by organizations
- Use social media

**Roles open to advocacy anytime:**

- Citizen/resident/constituent
- Employee
- Union or professional association member
- Faith group member
- Political party member
- Family member and friend
- Etc.
Read the full BC Child Poverty Report Card, support our calls to action, and subscribe to the The Child & Youth Advocate newsletter at:  www.firstcallbc.org

Attend a First Call monthly Network meeting: https://firstcallbc.org/get-involved/monthly-network-meetings/ or Early Childhood Development Roundtable meeting: https://firstcallbc.org/get-involved/ecd-roundtable-meetings/  

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