

# The Child Indicator

THE CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY INDICATORS NEWSLETTER

Spring 2011  
Publication # 2011-17

Vol. 11, Issue No. 2

## Preview: Third International Conference, International Society for Child Indicators

Child Trends recently interviewed Asher Ben-Arieh, co-chair of the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI), about the upcoming conference (July 27-29, in York, England), and some of the issues facing the field of child indicators. (Comments are paraphrased.)

**CT:** This is the third international conference for ISCI. What are some things that will distinguish the presentations from those at the first conference?

**ABA:** The big changes are size, and coverage. The first year, we thought if we got 70 people to attend, that would be great; we had 120. The second year, more than 200 came. This year, we have more than 300 coming, from more than 20 countries; we've received abstracts/papers from people we hadn't heard from previously, and from places not previously represented. *(Editor's note: Readers can view the abstracts accepted for the conference at <http://www.york.ac.uk/conferences/ISCI2011/conference-abstracts.htm>).*

**CT:** To some extent, what a society measures reflects what it considers important. Is there evidence that a country's, or a community's, having a well-developed child indicator system is related to the well-being of its children? Are there specific success stories, where having a good indicator was instrumental in galvanizing the attention of leaders or advocates?

**ABA:** Probably the best examples are the United Kingdom, and its adoption of a goal of ending child poverty, and the National Children's Strategy in Ireland. *(Editor's note: The UK's goal of ending child poverty in ten years was not met, but the rate was cut by half between 1999 and 2009. Ireland's strategy document, adopted in 2000, specifies objectives and measures, and commits to regular reporting on progress.)*

**CT:** Are "positive" indicators for children always going to be more controversial than the "negative" ones?

**ABA:** We already know the bad news—at least in terms of the research. It's important to keep in mind that it took 70 or more years to agree even on what constitutes negative well-being; this is reflected now in some agreement around what are children's rights, the harms of corporal punishment, and so on. We only started talking about positive indicators 10 or 12 years ago, so it's not surprising that we haven't made more progress here.

## In This Issue...

Preview: Third International Conference, International Society for Child Indicators pp. 1-2

Immigrant Children are the Focus in *The Future of Children* p. 2

Statistical Portraits of Latinos p. 3

GAO Studies Indicator Systems p. 3

**"Basic Economic Security Tables"** Quantify Family Security p. 4

KIDS COUNT Data Center Expands Its Indicator Catalog p. 4

New Federal Resources Make More Data More Accessible pp. 5-6

US Teen Birth Rate Continues to Drop pp. 6-7

**The State of the World's Children** p. 7

Wikichild Migrates p. 8

Online State Snapshots Demonstrate Child Health Disparities p. 8

**Child Trends' Databank of Indicators** p. 8

About The Child Indicator p. 9

Written by: David Murphey, Ph.D.



*continued on p. 2*

*ABA Continued...*

Perhaps it is true that positive indicators are more contingent on values. Now that the debates on what are the negative indicators are largely behind us, we can pursue more research, including longitudinal studies, on the positive.

**CT:** What do you see as the prospects for a small, core set of child indicators that would be adopted and prioritized by leading nations?

**ABA:** We're a long way from that, especially if we want to go beyond the negative. It's easier to agree on indicators that are connected to services, but different countries are looking for different qualities—for example, for education. So I don't think it's realistic to think we'll see a single set.

**CT:** As a strategy to gain more attention to the needs of children, the "resource" or "investment" metaphor has been the dominant one (at least in the U.S.) in recent years. Are there other models that would be fruitful to consider, and that would pull the public's attention?

**ABA:** Well, this is a political issue; I still think it's best to emphasize investments in children. If so far it hasn't succeeded as much as we'd like, that doesn't mean it's the wrong strategy. In Europe there tends to be more of an emphasis on "children as human beings"—that is, children deserve well-being because they are human beings. This is reflected in the focus on children's rights, for instance.

**CT:** We look forward to meeting with you and other colleagues in York!

Registration for the ISCI conference is at: [www.york.ac.uk/conferences/ISCI2011/Registration.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/conferences/ISCI2011/Registration.htm)

## Immigrant Children are Focus of *The Future of Children*

The Spring 2011 issue of *The Future of Children*, a project of Princeton University and the Brookings Institution, is devoted to immigrant children—defined as children birth to age 17 who have at least one foreign-born parent. There is great diversity within this population, as is reflected in a number of well-being indicators. **The volume's ten chapters treat issues ranging from physical and psychological health, to living arrangements, educational outcomes, and adaptation to life in the U.S.** Immigrant children are the fastest-growing segment of the population—as of 2008, this group comprised nearly one in four of all U.S. children—and our need **to ensure their success into adulthood will directly compete against the needs of another demographic "bulge": the aging baby boomers.**

Some highlights from the volume:

- On most social indicators, immigrant children are at a disadvantage relative to their native-born counterparts.
- However, immigrant youth do have the advantage of being more likely to reside with two parents, a family circumstance that is generally associated with better outcomes for children than is living with a single parent.
- The educational progress of many immigrant children is held up by the combination of their limited English proficiency and the limited educational attainment of their parents.
- Adolescents from Asian immigrant families, while more likely than their peers to do well academically, are also more likely to experience social-emotional difficulties.
- Immigrant children are more likely than native children to be in poverty, and to receive some type of public assistance.
- Racism persists in attitudes toward particular immigrant groups, and negative self-perceptions can endure into the third and fourth generations.

The full volume, as well as article summaries, is available at <http://www.futureofchildren.org/>

## Statistical Portrait of Latinos

Detailed tabulations of 2009 American Community Survey data profile the Latino population at a national level in this report. Among the tables of specific relevance to issues of children are the following:

- Race and ethnicity by sex and age
- Living arrangements of children by race and ethnicity
- Heads of households by family size, race, and ethnicity
- Language spoken at home and English-speaking ability by age, race, and ethnicity
- Educational attainment by race and ethnicity

See the data at <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=70>

## GAO Studies Indicator Systems

The health care reform act passed in 2010 authorized the National Academy of Sciences and an appointed commission to oversee the development of a national system of key indicators for the U.S. The act also directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study **1) how indicator systems are being used; 2) how they are designed and developed; 3) what's needed to sustain such systems; and 4) implications for the development and use of a U.S. system.**

This is not the first time the GAO has studied indicator systems; most recently, a 2004 report reviewed some key indicator systems. The current report draws on information on 20 systems used in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world, and reviews seven of these in depth:

- **Measures of Australia's Progress**
- MONET Indicator System (Switzerland)
- Government Sustainable Development Indicators (United Kingdom)
- Community Indicators, Victoria (Australia)
- Virginia Performs
- King County (WA) AIMS High
- Boston Indicators Project

Among the purposes GAO identified indicator systems fulfilling were increasing transparency and public awareness; fostering civic engagement and collaboration; and monitoring progress, aiding decision-making, and promoting accountability. Other important findings were these:

- There is value in consulting experts and stakeholders about the purpose and design of an indicator system
- Indicators selected should be relevant, and based on reliable data
- Where feasible, data should be disaggregated, and presented in a comparative context
- Sustaining indicator systems is a constant challenge; thus, an inclusive process for developing and revising the system is required.

To read the full report, go to <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11396.pdf>

## “Basic Economic Security Tables” Quantify Family Economic Security

The effects of poverty on child well-being, evident as early as infancy, continue throughout life. Part of the calculus for any measure of poverty is an estimate of the cost of meeting basic needs. A number of different methodologies have been applied to this task, at both national and local levels. Few are as comprehensive as the recently released Basic Economic Security Tables (BEST) for the United States, 2010.

A project of Wider Opportunities for Women and the Center for Social Development at Washington University (St. Louis), the BEST Index is intended as “a measure of the basic needs and assets workers require for economic security throughout a lifetime and across generations.” As such, the Index can aid researchers, policymakers, and advocates in evaluating economic development, education and training needs, public assistance programs, financial planning and asset-building programs, and in raising public awareness of the components of economic security in the context of multiple family configurations.

More than 400 separate tables are available (in the on-line version of the report), that depict the needs of different family types—all possible variants of one- or two-worker families with up to six children (with children further subdivided into infants/toddlers, preschoolers, schoolchildren, and teenagers). Drawing predominantly on federal government sources, BEST calculates income requirements for workers with and without access to employer-based benefits, and also distinguishes between those covered and not covered by unemployment insurance. However, BEST moves beyond calculation of a basic-needs budget by including assets (short- and long-term) in its calculation of what’s needed to attain economic security over the lifespan. At a minimum, families need some savings to address emergencies, and some to meet needs in retirement.

Following are some highlights from the Index calculations:

- A U.S. family including two workers who receive employment-based benefits, one preschooler, and one school-age child requires an annual income of \$67,920.
- In most families with two or more young children, the biggest single expense is child care.
- Of the jobs created between now and 2018, more than two-thirds will not require a four-year degree. However, most of those jobs will be low-paying, care-related jobs; fewer than 15 percent will provide economic security to a single parent raising two or more children.

To learn more about the Basic Economic Security Tables Initiative, go to <http://www.wowonline.org/usbest/index.asp>

## KIDS COUNT Data Center Expands its Indicator Catalog

The [Data Center](#), already an important go-to site for a wealth of state-level data on child well-being, has recently added a number of indicators. The Data Center has also expanded the list of indicators it makes available at the Congressional District level.

**Among the new indicators for states are measures of children’s preventive dental care, oral health, and emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems.** Other recent additions include indicators of food insecurity, school retention, health-related school absences, and Head Start enrollment.

At the Congressional District level are a number of poverty-related indicators, as well as unemployment data, and indicators of family structure, English learners, and high school dropout.

Still more additions to the Data Center are planned. Users can look forward to accessing alternative measures of poverty; participation in the food stamp program; children’s “screen time”; and data on child maltreatment and foster care—among others.

The Data Center can be accessed at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

## New Federal Resources Make More Data More Accessible

**Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data.** The U.S. Administration for Children & Families (ACF), within the Department of Health and Human Services, has the Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data website. Designed to make data published in *Child Welfare Outcomes 2004-2007: Report to Congress* more accessible, the site includes state-level data on the seven outcome categories required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (1997), plus contextual factors. The outcome categories are:

- Recurrence of maltreatment within six months
- Maltreatment in foster care
- Exits of children from foster care
- Time to reunification/children re-entering foster care
- Time to adoption
- Number of placements by time in care
- Most recent placement settings

Data for most of the measures come from the Department's two national child welfare-related data systems—the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

**An interactive map, and a “custom report builder” that allows users to produce reports on single states, or groups of states, are also features of the website.**

For more information about the project, go to <http://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/data/>

**Health Indicators Warehouse.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has launched a new web portal for health and health care indicator data. The Health Indicators Warehouse is described as “a vast collection of . . . indicators along with new web 2.0 technologies to support automated data services through application programming interfaces.” Currently, the Warehouse includes roughly 1,200 health indicators derived from more than 170 data sources. Many of the indicators include data that reach down to state, county, or hospital referral regions, as well as national-level information.

HHS is promoting the Warehouse as “the data hub” for its Community Health Data Initiative, intended to encourage openness in data sharing and innovation in application development, and to catalyze improvements in community health. As an ongoing project, the Warehouse will see new indicators added over time, while others are retired. Functions already on the site include mapping and charting, and links to evidence-based interventions.

More information is at <http://healthindicators.gov/>

**EISi.** The Elementary/Secondary Information System (EISi) is a web application of the National Center for Education Statistics. Using data from the Common Core of Data and Private School Survey, EISi allows users quick access to public and private school data, in the form of pre-tabulated or custom-created tables and charts. Geographic levels available are state, county, district, and school.

The site is <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/>

**Safe & Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center.** To support the work of states implementing “safe and supportive” school policies (particularly the 11 states receiving FY2010 grants), the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools has created a web site, Safe and Supportive Schools. The site is a resource for schools that want to attend to issues known variously as “school climate” or “conditions for learning.” An initial set of indicators is included on the site, as are links to webinars on topics related to assessing and improving school climate.

For more information on these “data trends and indicators,” see <http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=27>

**continued on p. 6**

## More Federal Resources

*continued from page 5*

**New Data on High School Course Taking: 2009 NAEP Transcript Study.** In tracking indicators of academic achievement among youth, and readiness for in-demand, career-level jobs, monitoring high school graduation rates is insufficient. We need to know how many students are learning challenging material and accumulating credits in the kinds of rigorous courses that will prepare them to compete globally, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Data from a nationally representative sample of 2009 U.S. high school graduates are now available in a report from the National Center for Education Statistics. They show there has been marked progress in these areas since 1990; but gains since 2000 have been slower, and there are great disparities among racial/ethnic groups.

**What defines a “rigorous” curriculum? According to the report, credits by graduation should include four in English, three in social studies, and four in mathematics (which should include pre-calculus or higher); courses in biology, chemistry, and physics; and at least three credits in foreign languages.** In 2009, 29 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders completed a rigorous curriculum, compared with 14, six, and eight percent of white, black, and Hispanic graduates, respectively.

Starting on this pathway needs to begin early: almost two-thirds of students who attained a rigorous curriculum took algebra I before high school.

Despite increased attention to the importance of STEM courses, the proportion of graduates earning credits in engineering/science technologies and health science/technology courses has not changed significantly since 2000, and the percentage earning credits in computer science has declined since then.

The report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2011462.asp>

**Atlas of Rural & Small-Town America.** The nonmetropolitan U.S., including about 2,000 counties, is home to nearly 50 million people in rural areas and small towns. The economic and social challenges and opportunities they face are quite different from those that affect the larger U.S. cities. The Atlas of Rural & Small-Town America aims to portray the scope and diversity of a number of trends, by mapping at a county level more than 60 statistical indicators. Data come from several sources, including the American Community Survey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Census of Agriculture.

In addition to showing differences between metro and non-metro counties, the Atlas can further differentiate these more-rural areas by breaking out those, for instance, that are farm-dependent, recreation-based, retirement destinations, in persistent poverty, or with large numbers of immigrants. Maps that can be zoomed and panned are part of the site features; and all data can be printed or downloaded.

The Atlas is at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/ruralatlas/>

## Teen Birth Rate Continues to Drop

**One of the relatively few “good news” indicator stories in the current environment is the continued decline in the U.S. teen birth rate.** Following two years of reversal (2006 and 2007), the rate (in 2008 and 2009—the most recent data) has resumed an historic decline. At 39.1 births per 1,000 women ages 15-19, in 2009, this is the lowest figure ever recorded for this rate (a period covering nearly 70 years). Nevertheless, the U.S. rate remains the highest among industrialized countries.

A summary of these trends was recently provided by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). It shows that teen birth rates have declined for younger as well as older teens, and for all racial and ethnic groups. Among the states, 31 had declines during 2007-2009 in birth rates for younger teens (ages 15-17), with the greatest declines occurring in the intermountain west and in the southeast. Only West Virginia had a statistically significant increase (17 percent). For older teens (ages 18-19), birth rates fell in 45 states during 2007-2009, with the biggest

*continued on p. 7*

## Teen Birth Rate

continued from p. 6

declines in the intermountain west and northern New England.

NCHS points to several factors that may be contributing to these declines, including strong pregnancy prevention messages directed at teens, declining percentages of teens engaging in sexual intercourse, and increasing or stable rates of contraception use.

The report is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db58.pdf>

Child Trends' analysis of recent data on teen childbearing, including trends by marital status, race/Hispanic origin, and birthweight status, as well as related indicators is available in *Facts at A Glance*, [http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child\\_Trends-2011\\_04\\_14\\_FG\\_2011.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2011_04_14_FG_2011.pdf). The publication also tabulates related data for 72 large U.S. cities.

## The State of the World's Children 2011

The annual report from UNICEF has as its theme this year "Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity." Defined by the United Nations as young people between the ages of 10 and 19, adolescents are an often overlooked group, as countries grapple with constrained resources. However, they are a pivotal group to invest in, both in order to sustain the progress made in improving the well-being of the youngest children, to reduce harmful behaviors, and to ensure the world has the benefit of all that adolescents have to offer—now, and as future adults.

Compared with the issues of adolescence familiar to those of us in the U.S., the global picture offers both similarities and differences:

- Unintentional injuries are a prime cause of adolescent deaths worldwide.
- In developing countries, about 11 percent of females and six percent of males ages 15-19 report they had sex prior to age 15.
- Depression, eating disorders, and self-destructive behaviors are on the rise in many countries.
- In many developing countries, a gender gap in nutrition opens in adolescence, with girls faring worse, leading to serious health risks, including complications in pregnancy and childbirth.
- Unemployment affects 81 million young people; the highest rates are in northern Africa, the Middle East, and the former soviet bloc countries.

The report makes several recommendations:

- Improve data collection and analysis
- Invest in education and training
- Institutionalize mechanisms for youth participation in civic life
- Create a supportive environment for child and adolescent rights

View the report at [http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/pdfs/SOWC-2011-Main-Report\\_EN\\_02092011.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/pdfs/SOWC-2011-Main-Report_EN_02092011.pdf)

## Wikichild Migrates

Wikichild, a project of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is now part of [Wikiprogress](#), which is the main platform of the Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies. Wikichild, designed for the global community of researchers and analysts in child policy and well-being, will now be a network within [Wikiprogress](#).

Wikiprogress is at [www.wikiprogress.org](http://www.wikiprogress.org)

## Online State Snapshots Demonstrate Child Health Disparities

The [Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health \(DRC\)](#) website, sponsored by the [Maternal and Child Health Bureau](#), provides free, easy access to more than 100 child indicators on numerous health topics, including information about families of children with special health care needs (CSHCN). Indicators are available at both the national and state level and on a variety of subgroups of children.

A recent addition to the DRC website is a new state snapshot report that allows data users and child health advocates to assess state variations and disparities in health and health system performance. The [2007 National Survey of Children's Health \(NSCH\) Child Health and System Performance Profile](#) highlights health disparities among CSHCN and children who various types of health insurance.

The data snapshots include an overview of how children in a state compare to the nation on 21 key health status and system performance measures related to chronic conditions, complexity of health service needs, health insurance, access to care, preventive care and medical home, as well as a composite quality index comprising medical home, access to preventive care and adequate insurance.

The 2009/10 National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs, with more than 60 indicators of health and system performance for CSHCN, is scheduled for release in fall of 2011.

For more information on the DRC or to request technical assistance, please visit [childhealthdata.org](http://childhealthdata.org).

## Child Trends Databank

The [Child Trends DataBank \(www.childtrendsdatabank.org\)](#), a compendium of more than 100 indicators of children's well-being and the context for their development, is a resource for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and others. Along with trend data, for each indicator we summarize why it's important, what we know about how to bend the trend in a desired direction, and links, where available, to state, local, and international data. Several new indicators have been added to the [DataBank](#) in the past year, including **Bullying, Children's Exposure to Violence, Preterm Births, Youth Employment, and Parental Expectations for Academic Achievement**.

## About The Child Indicator

The goal of *The Child Indicator* is to communicate major developments and new resources within each sector of the child and youth indicators field to the larger community of interested users, researchers, and data developers on a regular basis. By promoting the efficient sharing of knowledge, ideas, and resources, *The Child Indicator* seeks to advance understanding within the child and youth indicators community and to make all of its members more effective in their work. Past issues are available at [www.childtrends.org/ci](http://www.childtrends.org/ci).

Child Trends produces and distributes *The Child Indicator* with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We welcome your comments and suggestions. All communications regarding this newsletter can be directed to [childindicator@childtrends.org](mailto:childindicator@childtrends.org).

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that studies children at all stages of development. Our mission is to improve outcomes for children by providing research, data, and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children. For additional information on Child Trends, including publications available to download, visit our Web site at [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org). For the latest information on more than 100 key indicators of child and youth well-being, visit the *Child Trends DataBank* at [www.childtrendsdatabank.org](http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org). For summaries of over 500 evaluations of out-of-school time programs that work (or don't) to enhance children's development, visit [www.childtrends.org/WhatWorks](http://www.childtrends.org/WhatWorks).

© 2011 Child Trends. May be reprinted with citation.

