

The Child Indicator

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Measuring Subjective Well-Being

While it has broad acceptance in many European countries, the measurement of subjective well-being has met with some skepticism in the U.S.¹ However, beginning in 2010 and repeated in 2012, a Subjective Well-Being (SWB) module was included in the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey. Sponsored by the National Institute on Aging, the SWB module currently surveys individuals ages 15 and above, and links their self-reported well-being to their activities and time use.

The National Research Council was recently asked to evaluate the usefulness of the SWB module and to consider the value of continuing it in 2013, as well as to offer guidance more generally on including SWB measures in other government-sponsored surveys. The Council's report cites "compelling" evidence that high levels of self-reported well-being are associated with a number of desirable outcomes, ranging from better health to more stable social relationships and greater economic productivity.

Interestingly, while well-being researchers in other countries often focus on perceived "happiness," this module asks people to respond not only about how happy they felt while engaged in specific activities during the previous day (and how meaningful they considered those activities), but also how tired, sad, stressed, and in pain they felt.

The 2012 version of the module also includes a question on overall life satisfaction (an approach more consistent with many European measurement strategies). Collecting both "hedonic" and "evaluative" well-being measures allows for potentially revealing comparisons; for example, it might shed light on why students make investments in schooling that may impose significant short-term burdens of cost and effort, but lead to greater satisfaction in the longer term.

The report of the Panel on Measuring Subjective Well-Being in a Policy-Relevant Framework is available at http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13535

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¹ See Measuring Qualitative Well-Being, in the Spring 2009 Child Indicator.
http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2009_06_09_FR_ChildIndSpring09.pdf

Violent Crime Against Youth, 1994-2010

Given recent highly publicized incidents of violence against children, it may come as a surprise to learn that serious violent crime against U.S. youth (ages 12-17) fell by 77 percent between 1994 and 2010. In 1994, there were 62 victimizations per 1,000 youth in this age group; in 2010, 14 per thousand. The greater decline in these crimes occurred between 1994 and 2002; however, even since 2002, the rate has declined by 27 percent.

Serious violent crime includes rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault. Data come from the National Crime Victimization Survey, responded to by a nationally representative sample of U.S. households.

Among the other findings in this recent Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report:

- From 1994 to 2010, fewer than half of violent crimes against youth were reported to police.
- In 1994, male youth were nearly twice as likely as female youth to be victims of violent crime. In 2010, however, their victimization rates were nearly equal.
- Female youth were much more likely than males to be victims of serious violence by an intimate partner.
- In 2010, black youth had higher rates of victimization by violent crime than did other tabulated racial/ethnic groups. Between 2002 and 2010, while rates declined for white and Hispanic youth, they did not change for black youth.

The BJS report is available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/vcay9410.pdf>

News (and new products) from the U.S. Census Bureau

Four New ACS Products Released.

The Census Bureau has recently made available the following data products from the American Community Survey (ACS):

- 5-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), 2007-2011. The PUMS files are de-identified, untabulated records that can be used to create tables not available through pretabulated or summary ACS data products.
- 2011 estimates for Congressional Districts of the 113th Congress.
- 2011, 2009-2011, and 2007-2011 estimates (in Spanish) from the Puerto Rico Community Survey.
- Estimates of the citizen voting-age population, 2007-2011. These are shown by race for small areas of geography.

FactFinder, the Census Bureau's primary website for accessing decennial census and American Community Survey (ACS) data, has been re-designed, in the interest of making the site more navigable for users of all levels. See <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>

Easy Stats is a mobile-device-friendly application for accessing data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Geographies available include state, county, place, and Congressional District; topics are organized by five broad categories: financial, jobs, housing, people, and education. See <http://www.census.gov/easystats/>

Census Data Mapper (beta version).

This tool provides county-based demographic maps, using 2010 Census data. Maps can be viewed, saved, and printed. <http://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/maps/datamapper.html>

Downloading Bulk Census Data.

All data for a given "summary" level (state, county, place, etc.) within a state can be downloaded from the U.S. Census Bureau. Because of their size, each table is a separate download. A form at the site listed below helps users select a specific state, geographic level, and table. The form can also be used to download the corresponding shapefiles which can be used to display the data on a map. See <http://census.ire.org/data/bulkdata.html>

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Counting Hispanics. It has been a challenge for the Census Bureau (and for many others who collect these data) to keep pace with the rapidly evolving ways that Americans identify themselves with respect to race/ethnicity/ancestry/culture. A major change, introduced in 1997 by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), separated “ethnicity” (essentially, Hispanic/Latino versus not Hispanic/Latino) from “race” (five categories, as well as “other”). However, there continue to be problems with how survey respondents use these categories, with Latino/Hispanic in particular often written in under “race.” In addition, respondents in general under-utilize the option of reporting multiple races. It all points to the remarkable fluidity of these socially constructed categories, especially within younger generations (who, by any measure, are more diverse than their elders).

Now, the Census Bureau is testing a combined “race or origin” question, in order to address some of the weaknesses of the current system. Multi-racial would be the first option listed in the proposed scenario, and Latino/Hispanic would be included, so that—unlike in the current two-part system—categories would sum to 100 percent.

Online response option for ACS. As we hurtle into an ever-more-digital age, the Census Bureau is along for the ride. Beginning in 2013, most households sampled for the ACS will have the option of accessing a secure website, which will present the survey questions, including some new items on computer and Internet use. Respondents who take this option will be able to access online help and review their responses. Of course, this also saves significant printing, paper, postage, and processing costs. Data collected through the online option will first be featured in products appearing in late 2014.

International News

Shorter Lives, Poorer Health

In an indicators report likely to be disturbing to many Americans, the Committee on Population at the National Research Council identifies “a pervasive pattern of shorter lives and poorer health” in comparisons of U.S. data with statistics from 16 “peer countries.” This record, developing over multiple recent decades, pervades the life course—from birth, through childhood and adolescence, and into young, middle, and older adulthood.

Among the areas of health where Americans notably lag their international peers:

- Infant mortality and low birthweight,
- Adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections,
- Injuries and homicides, and
- Deaths related to drug abuse.

Effects of these disparities disproportionately affect young people, reducing expected years of life up to age 50. Evidence suggests that even advantaged Americans—those who are white, insured, college-educated, or in the upper income levels—fare worse than similar individuals in other countries.

So, what explains the U.S. rank of 17th in life expectancy among high-income countries? The National Research Council report proposes several answers:

- Relatively high rates of child poverty.
- A less-comprehensive social “safety net,” including a relatively large uninsured population and other barriers to accessing primary care.
- Higher rates of certain risky behaviors: overeating, drug abuse, drunk driving, gun violence.
- Built environments that tend to be organized around motor vehicles rather than around physical activity.

The report predicts little change in these American disadvantages without the government and the media mobilizing an informed public discussion of these issues.

The NRC report is available at http://download.nap.edu/cart/download.cgi?&record_id=13497&free=1

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World Family Map.

The World Family Map (WFM) is an ambitious new project of Child Trends, supported by a number of sponsors, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Global Focus, and the Social Trends Institute. WFM has just released its first annual report, subtitled **“Mapping Family Change and Child Well-Being Outcomes,”** which includes an essay on children’s living arrangements and educational outcomes around the world. The report itself covers family trends in 45 countries, representing every region of the world, and the majority of the global population. Indicators in this edition of the WFM include *family structure* (i.e., the number of parents in the household), *family socioeconomics*, *family processes*, and *family culture*.

The report essay points to strong evidence that, in middle- and high-income countries, children living with two parents are more likely to stay on track in school and have greater reading literacy than are children living with one or no parents. However, in many low-income countries (mostly in the southern hemisphere), this advantage is not found. The report suggests several explanations, including support (social and financial) from extended family, or from a non-resident parent working away from home; and increased investment and/or greater control of resources on the part of single mothers. Moreover, in many low-income countries, **family structure may simply matter less for children’s education than do serious deficits in these countries’ educational infrastructure, as well as widespread threats to children’s health and nutrition.**

More information on the WFM is at <http://worldfamilymap.org/2013/>

UNICEF: Generation 2025 and beyond.

Reporting on global demographic trends for children of the 21st century, this report offers some striking facts:

- **Between 2010 and 2012, the number of the world’s children will increase just slightly, but there will be marked changes in its composition and concentration.**
- The largest growth in the child population will occur in the poorest regions and countries of the world.
- By the middle of the century, nearly one in three children will be African.
- Within countries, deaths of young children (under five years of age) will be increasingly concentrated in those provinces, households, and social groups that are the poorest and most marginalized.
- In the developing world, children born since 2000 are the first generation with an average life expectancy at birth at 65 years of age.

Find the entire report at http://www.childinfo.org/files/Generation_2025_and_beyond_Nov2012.pdf

Highlights from TIMSS, PIRLS: Signs of progress for U.S. students

PIRLS (the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) are two education measurement programs that help put the academic achievement of U.S. students in an international context.

The U.S. Department of Education recently published highlights from the 2011 PIRLS and TIMSS data. PIRLS assesses student achievement, at the fourth-grade level, on a combined literacy scale, and two subscales. In 2011, there were five education systems with average combined scores higher than that for the U.S.; the U.S. average was higher than that of 40 education systems. Between 2001 and 2011, the U.S. score increased by 14 points. The average score for girls was 11 points higher than the average scores for boys in the U.S.

TIMSS assesses achievement at fourth and eighth grades. At grade four, eight education systems had higher, and 42 had lower, average mathematics scores than the U.S. average. The U.S. average mathematics score was 23 points higher in 2011 than in 1995.

More information on PIRLS and TIMSS, respectively, is at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/pirls2011.asp> and <http://nces.ed.gov/timss/results11.asp>.

“Education for All” Global Monitoring Report.

In 2000, 164 countries, meeting as the World Education Forum, collectively committed to achieving by 2015 six “Education for All” (EFA) goals:

- Expand early care and education;
- Achieve universal primary education;
- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults;
- Reduce adult illiteracy by 50%;
- Achieve gender parity and equity; and
- Improve the quality of education.

An EFA Index captures countries’ performance on five of the six goals (the exception is the third goal). However, according to a recent UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) report, most EFA goals are unlikely to be met.

Among the findings noted in the report:

- Moderate or severe stunting (a clear sign of malnutrition) affected 117 million children worldwide in 2010.
- By grade 3, children who have begun school late may be four times as likely to drop out as children who began school “on time.”
- Many children in low and lower middle income countries finish primary school without becoming literate.
- Globally, 17 million adolescents are not enrolled in school.

While many indicators paint a distressing picture, the report is also rich in examples of effective strategies for change, particularly those aimed at building foundational/transferable skills among youth.

Incidentally, the United States is 25th among 120 countries ranked on the EFA Index.

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012* is available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>

Innocenti’s new website.

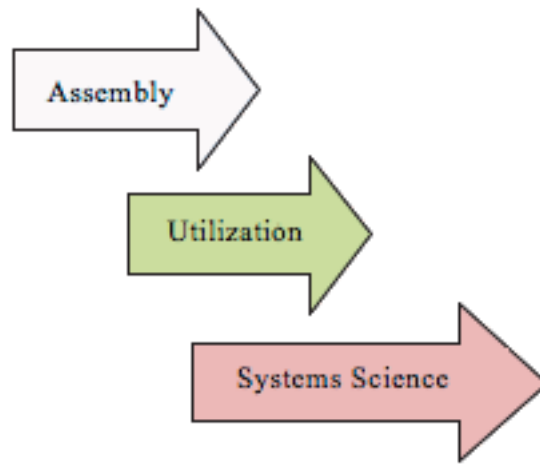
UNICEF’s Innocenti Research Center (IRC) has a new website: <http://www.unicef-irc.org/>. Still based in Florence, Italy, the IRC now is part of a single Office of Research.

Systems Science: A New Frame for Indicators?

Child indicators (and social indicators in general) have a developmental history that stretches at least as far back as the mid-20th century.² However, many would identify the period beginning in the early 1990s and continuing through the present as one of extraordinary strides for the field—**conceptually, technologically, and in terms of reach: both “vertically”**—at multiple organizational levels—and **“horizontally”**—across the globe.

2 Lippman, L. (2005). Indicators and indices of child well-being: A brief history. A KIDS COUNT Working Paper. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. One way to subdivide this period of knowledge growth is to think in terms of three phases.

Evolution in indicators knowledge



The first can be described as “assembly”: pulling together the requisite sources of data, systematizing definitions, and creating organizing frameworks that allowed for widespread production, publication, and dissemination of indicators. The emphasis was on moving beyond using anecdote and personal belief to characterize well-being, to having “hard” data. To measure is to understand (or, at least, is one important way to understand), and having the capacity for measurement also provides the basis for holding ourselves accountable for well-being improvement.³

The second phase for indicators (arriving somewhat later, but continuing in parallel with the first, which is certainly ongoing) could be called “utilization.” In this phase the challenge is, now that we have (lots of) indicators, what do we do with them? Here is where we refine tools that aid *interpretation* of the data, particularly for “non-data people.” How can we thoughtfully use indicators, not only to describe and monitor well-being trends, but to rally broad community engagement on behalf of well-being, identify areas of successful change (and resistance to change), and increase accountability for well-being at the levels of systems, agencies, programs, and individuals?⁴

The third phase (still emerging, and not eclipsing the earlier two) is pushing the field to situate social indicators within new paradigms of “systems science”—an imprecise term, but one which unsettles traditional thinking about context, causes, effects, and replicability. The “systems” phase (not by coincidence) is arising at the same time as a number of place-based, indicators-driven initiatives are being closely investigated. The use of indicators as monitors of complex community-based initiatives has posed numerous challenges.

Much of the leadership in this area comes from the field of public health. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences recently released *An Integrated Framework for Assessing the Value of Community-Based Prevention*. The IOM argues that one difficulty in calculating for a community the “value” of prevention (within a cost:benefit model) is that, not only may different communities value different outcomes, but “because communities vary so much in their characteristics, the causal links between interventions and valued outcomes may be different in different communities” (p. 5).

3 Brown, B. V. & Corbett, T. (1998). Social indicators and public policy in the age of devolution. IRP Special Report Series. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty.

Brown, B. & Moore, K. A. (2009). What gets measured gets done: High priority opportunities to improve our nation’s capacity to monitor child and youth well-being. A white paper for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/files/child_trends-2009_02_10_fr_wpaperchildwbeing.pdf

4 Brown, B. (Ed.) (2008). Key indicators of child and youth well-being: Completing the picture. NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.

The IOM report advances a number of provocative ideas:

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The IOM report advances a number of provocative ideas:

- One is a recommendation that researchers develop “a single metric for appraising a community’s well-being” (p. 8) to be used in calculating the benefits per dollar of community prevention efforts.
- The IOM report’s framework needs to demonstrate that it correctly distinguishes between well-being interventions that “work,” and those that do not.
- Community interventions interact with the cultural, social, political, and physical characteristics of a particular population; because these characteristics may themselves be transformed by the intervention, interpreting the *effect* of an intervention can be problematic.
- If interventions cannot be seen as exclusively “exogenous” to (that is, independent from) a community, but are shaped (unintentionally if not intentionally) by the particulars of a specific population, the replicability of interventions is likewise called into question. In other words, *external* validity may assume greater importance than *internal* validity.
- In short, the familiar linear research-to-practice paradigm may not suffice when it comes to interventions grounded in complex community settings.

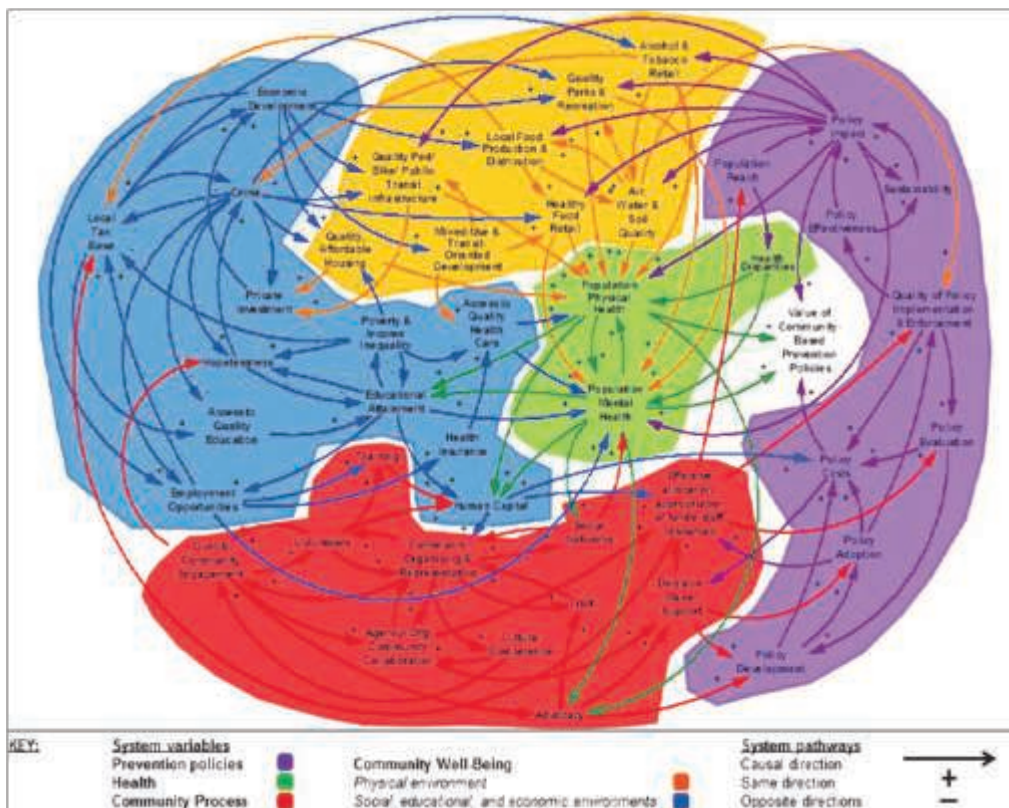


Figure courtesy of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences.

Systems science is designed to accommodate many of the challenges the report elucidates. It explicitly involves the modeling of multiple, often recursive pathways of cause and effect (unintended as well as intended), and includes feedback, shorter- and longer-term outcomes, and the dynamic aspect of community change. Thus, systems thinking (and the computer modeling tools—system dynamics, network analysis, agent-based modeling, etc.—that support it) may offer promise for making sense of the role that indicators play in this third developmental phase.

The IOM report is available at <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2012/An-Integrated-Framework-for-Assessing-the-Value-of-Community-Based-Prevention.aspx>

Short Takes

Health System Measurement Project.

Sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the federal Department of Health & Human Services, the new Health System Measurement Project tracks health system indicators in 10 topic areas:

- Access to care
- Health IT
- Quality
- Cost & affordability
- Innovation
- Coverage
- Population health
- Health care workforce, and
- Prevention

Using government data from a number of sources, the Project includes national trend data, and more detailed views that break out the data by age, sex, income level, and insurance coverage status.

For more information: <https://healthmeasures.aspe.hhs.gov/>

New Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, by State.

A significant step forward toward a common, rigorous measure of high school graduation in the U.S.—and one that conforms with **the public’s generally held concept of graduation rate**—was signaled recently by a Department of Education release. State-level four-year adjusted cohort rates for the 2010-11 school year reflect, in the words of the Department’s release, “**greater uniformity and transparency,**” as well as meeting federal requirements. The new calculation divides the number of graduating students in a given class by their numbers four years earlier (in ninth grade), adjusted for deaths, transfers out of the cohort, or emigration to another country.

Beginning with data for the 2011-12 school year, rates calculated by the new method will be used by state accountability systems.

For the new release, go to <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/state-2010-11-graduation-rate-data.pdf>

*The O*NET Resource Center* includes a continually updated database (O*Net Online) with information on hundreds of occupations. It provides tools to help workers or students who are seeking to find or change careers. For example, users can browse groups of similar occupations, or find those that use a specific tool or software. O*NET is a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration.

For more information: <http://www.onetonline.org/>

La Raza Data Explorer.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has a new web tool, the Latino Kids Data Explorer. It updates and expands NCLR’s 2010 publication, *America’s Future: Latino Child Well-Being in Numbers and Trends*. The Data Explorer offers 27 national and state-level indicators, in areas including demographics, health, education, housing, income, and juvenile justice.

Explore the Explorer at <http://www.nclr.org/index.php/latinokidsdata>

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.

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 dmurphey@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. 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. 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.

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