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# *Canadian Initiative on Social Statistics*

A PROSPECTUS

UNDERSTANDING TODAY AND SHAPING TOMORROW  
WITH SOCIAL STATISTICS

Canada

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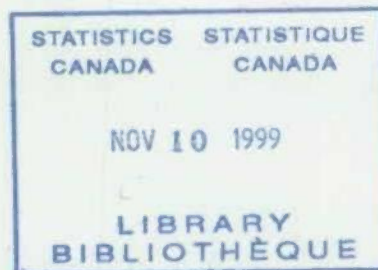
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# 1 What is the Canadian Initiative on Social Statistics?

The Canadian Initiative on Social Statistics (CISS) is a co-operative project of SSHRC and Statistics Canada. Its aim is to promote research and training in the application of social statistics.

## Context

Statistics Canada's reputation for high-quality, objective and timely information has gained the confidence of the public both at home and abroad. In large part, this reputation has been earned through the rich and unique set of data collection instruments and data sets it has developed in recent years with the support of major policy departments. These data provide the country with an excellent statistical base of information on critical social and socio-economic issues for which there is an increasing demand on the part of policy-makers. They cover a broad range of topics that are of key concern to Canadian society.

They include, among others,

- an exploration of the factors that determine child development, helping to explain the success and failure of youth in their transition from school to the labour market (NLSCY and YTIS Surveys)\*;
- surveys that shed light on the accumulating pension rights of Canadians and therefore on their

ability to sustain themselves after retirement (SFS)\*;

- the impact of competitive business practices on employees (WES)\*;
- the factors that determine the health of Canadians (NPHS)\*; and
- the incidence of crime and its impact on victims and society (GSS on Victimization)\*.

*\*Note: Acronyms refer to Statistics Canada surveys; for a list of some of their major household surveys, please refer to the last page of this prospectus.*

Unfortunately, a great deal of this valuable data is under-utilized because of Canada's lack of a national capacity to fully analyze them. Compounding this problem, basically a lack of training, is the difficulty of providing access for researchers to highly detailed files, because of Statistics Canada's legal responsibility to protect the confidentiality of individually identifiable responses. Against this backdrop lies a pressing need for current social statistics to sustain the increasing demand for evidence-based decision-making.



## A National Task Force

To address this problem, SSHRC and Statistics Canada brought together a joint National Task Force made up of leading Canadian researchers and statisticians. The task force studied a number of broad issues revolving around the use of large-scale quantitative databases (primarily those of Statistics Canada) and reviewed barriers that hamper the full utilization of data.

The Task Force identified three main barriers:

1. **lack of trained researchers** in the field of quantitative analysis, the need to train new researchers and build "la relève";
2. **lack of easy access** for researchers working outside Statistics Canada to the detailed micro-data collected by Statistics Canada; and
3. **lack of effective linkages** between researchers and those involved in public policy development.

## Three Key Objectives

The joint National Task Force reported to SSHRC and Statistics Canada in January 1999 and strongly recommended a series of measures to build an integrated research system in social statistics that would meet three key objectives:

1. **promote research and training** on issues that make full use of social statistics. This will be achieved through programs of

research support and training that will increase the number of researchers engaged in quantitative research;

2. **facilitate access** to Statistics Canada's detailed micro-data through the implementation of a system of research data centres; and
3. **maximize the research and public policy interface** by developing a dissemination and communications strategy that strengthens linkages between the policy-makers and the research community.

## The Action Plan

The joint National Task Force recommended several creative ways to eliminate the identified barriers. SSHRC and Statistics Canada believe that the following recommendations will strongly contribute, when implemented, to increase Canada's capacity to undertake major innovative, social research based on quantitative evidence.

The task force recommended:

1. the development of a wide range of granting programs to increase the number of researchers engaged in quantitative research, and promote research and training that make full use of social statistics. The programs will concentrate on training the younger generation to ensure "la relève" in the field and bring together researchers from



different disciplines and institutions. The creation of training programs such as summer schools will also provide specialized training in advanced statistical methods for both researchers and students;

2. the creation of a system of research data centres throughout the country where it will be possible for researchers to access complex Statistics Canada micro-data and where the confidentiality required will be maintained in accord with the *Statistics Act*; and
3. the development of a social statistics communications strategy to maximize the research and public policy interface and strengthen linkages between policy-makers and the research community. A key component will be the creation of research forums with the objective of bringing together social researchers who use a wide variety of methodologies with a broad range of policy analysts and decision-makers. Research forums will support research networks, provide an arena for the presentation of research findings, and enhance communication among qualitative and quantitative researchers, the policy community and the media.

## How Will CISS Benefit Canada and Canadians?

It will:

- help to monitor and understand critical economic and social trends in society, as well as the transformation of our economy and the impact this is having on Canadian society;
- strengthen evidence-based decision making at all levels of government;
- help Canada reinforce its social research capacity, shed more light on the state of Canadian society, and increase the understanding of our social dynamics;
- consolidate Canada's position as an innovator in longitudinal survey collection and analysis; and
- build Canada's capacity and expertise as a world leader in social and quantitative research.





## 2 *Financial Information*

It is estimated that, after a transition period of three years, the implementation of the proposed recommendations will require an annual budget of approximately \$20 million.

This budget will fund a variety of initiatives. The following are a few examples:

1. **research data centres** across the country through which users will be able to access micro-data;
2. **training programs** that will take many forms, one of them being *summer schools* that will provide specialized training in advanced statistical methods complementary to apprenticeships and graduate programs;
3. **fellowship programs** that will train graduate students and provide support for young researchers pursuing careers in social statistics;
4. **senior fellowship programs** that will enable some of Canada's leading social scientists to devote more of their time to research and provide leadership in the training of the next generation of researchers;
5. **research and training groups** that will bring together researchers from different disciplines and institutions to conduct quantitative research and training in priority areas; and
6. **a social statistics communication program** that will work toward raising the profile of social statistics research findings and furthering debate around the publication of such statistics. *Research forums* will be a key component of this program.





### 3 *Snapshots of Indicative Social Research*

A wide range of policy issues and research areas can be explored using social statistics. The four examples below illustrate how social statistics help us better understand our complex society and contribute to the development of social and economic policies. These examples are all drawn from the theme of children and youth, and illustrate the wealth of information that can be captured on one subject, and how the information can lead to the analysis of a broad range of issues, whether psychological, economic or social.

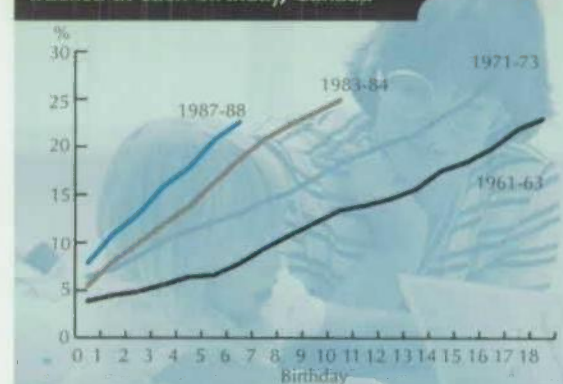
#### **Children Are Increasingly Experiencing the Separation of Their Parents**

Over the past 40 years, there has been an increasing tendency for young children to experience the separation of their parents. For example, 22% of children born during 1987-88 experienced the separation of their parents by age 6, up from 8% for children born during 1961-63. Part of this increase is due to the greater instability of common-law unions, which account for an increasing percentage of all births. For those born during the early 1960s, nearly one in four children experienced the separation of their parents by age 18. If recent trends continue, this could reach 35-40% for children born in the late 1980s.

Many children who experience the separation of their parents will subsequently live in more complex

family situations as one or both parents form new unions, often involving children from a different union. Recent findings suggest that these increasingly complex family trajectories have important implications for the lives of these children and data from the NLSCY and other surveys will allow us to look at this in more detail.

**Cumulated percentage of children who experienced the separation of their parents, tracked at each birthday, Canada**



SOURCE: Family Survey 1984, General Social Survey 1990, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth 1994 from Nicole Martel-Gauthier, *Growing up with Mom and Dad! The intricate family life courses of Canadian children*, Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, 1998.

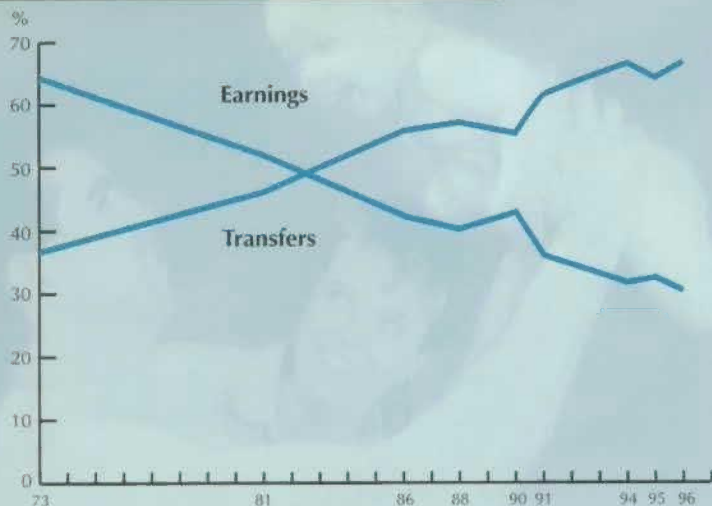


## Increasing Reliance on Social Transfers by Low-Income Families With Children

Low income among children is a priority for many governments. Clearly, what is happening in the job market for the young in particular affects the likelihood that children will be in low-income brackets. The source of income for young families with children has changed radically. In the 1970s, most of young families' income came from a job. Employment earnings accounted for about two-thirds (2/3) of

their earnings, government transfer payments one-third (1/3). This has been reversed, as employment earnings fell continuously for these families through the 1980s and 1990s, and government transfers took up the slack. By the late 1990s, the share of income from employment earnings had fallen to one-third, with government transfers accounting for about two-thirds.

**Sources of Disposable Family Income**  
Low-Income Families with Children, 1973-96



Young families with children have become increasingly dependent on government transfers (particularly social assistance) over the past 20 years. Little is known about this trend. Is it because job opportunities for the less skilled young deteriorated in an increasingly "knowledge-based" economy, or is it that as transfer benefits increased (at least to the mid-1990s), the work-disincentive increased and people chose not to seek work? And what will be the effect of this increased reliance on social assistance on

children? Numerous questions persist, requiring additional quantitative research, in order to produce an appropriate policy response.

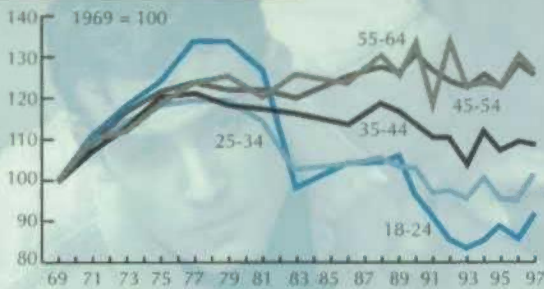
SOURCE: Picot, G., Myles, J., and Pypar, W., Markets, Families and Social Transfers: Trends in Low-Income Among the Young and the Old, 1973-96, in the monograph, Labour Markets, Social Institutions, and the Future of Canada's Children, Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, 1998



## Declining Earnings Among the Young

One of the predominant features of the labour market of the 1980s and 1990s is the increasing wage gap between younger and older workers, and declining earnings among

**Indexed Real Annual Wages and Salaries of Workers, 1969-97 (Men)**

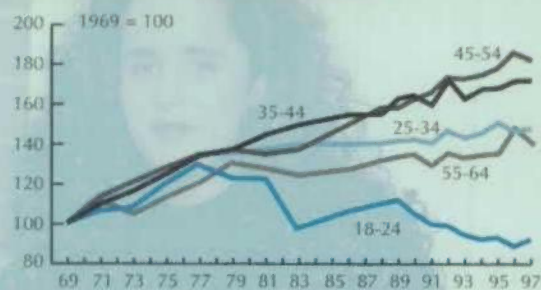


younger workers, particularly males. The two charts plot growth in real annual earnings between 1969 and 1997 for people working full-time, year-round. Following substantial and widespread growth during the early 1970s, earning gains stopped in the late 1970s. Through the 1980s and 1990s, earnings have fallen continuously for men under age 35, while rising for men aged 45-64. Among women, earnings have stabilized among younger workers (under 35), but have risen dramatically among full-time year-round female workers over 35. Hence, among both men and women there has been an increase in the wage gap between the young and the old. This leads to many questions.

First, is the decline temporary in the sense that as workers age their earnings "catch up" to that of their counterparts in earlier cohorts? The answer seems to be no. Work

based on longitudinal data suggest that the age-earnings profile has shifted downward for each successive cohort of workers through the 1980s and 1990s, e.g., persons entering the labour force in 1990. This suggests a potential drop in their real standard of living over their lifetime. This decline in youth earnings seems to be widespread, particularly for males. Among men, this pattern is observed in most occupations, industries, provinces, and most importantly, education groups. Having a higher education has not protected young males from this decline. While more highly educated workers continue to earn more than the less educated (by about the same amount as they always have), the earnings of each successive cohort of young workers has fallen, even among the university-educated. Little is known regarding the cause of this change in the earnings patterns of the young and old. Additional quantitative analysis is needed to shed further light on this issue.

**Indexed Real Annual Wages and Salaries of Workers, 1969-97 (Women)**



SOURCE: Picot, G., What is Happening to Earnings Inequality and Youth Wages in the 1990's? *Canadian Economic Observer*, September 1998.



## Low Income in Early Years Affects School Achievement

According to research done in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the mathematics performance of Ontario students has consistently lagged behind that of three other provinces and many countries. A 1999 study commissioned by the

Children from lower income families generally score below provincial standards for grade 3 mathematics.

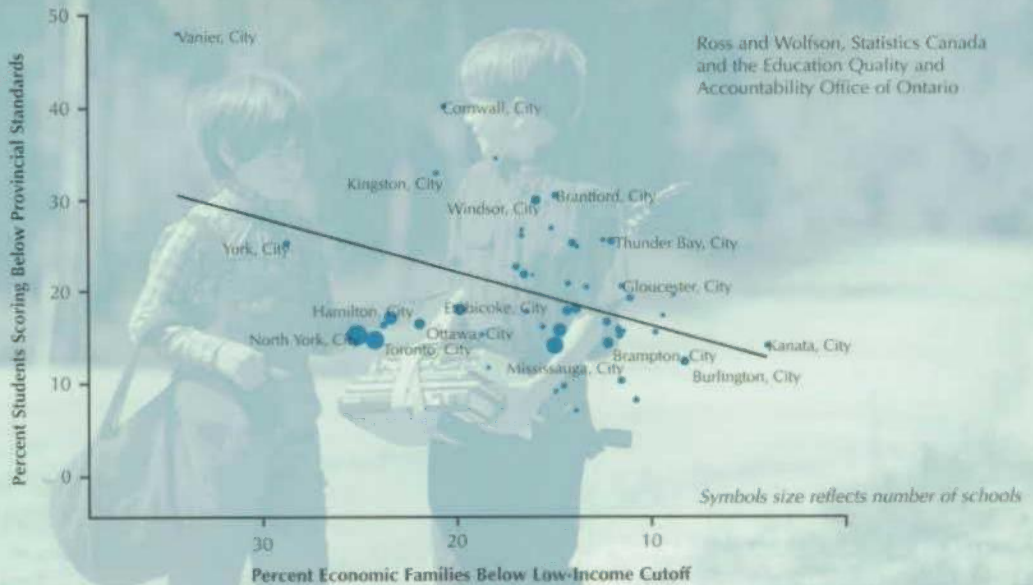
Ontario government shows that children from lower income families generally score below provincial standards for grade 3 mathematics (Figure 1), and also for reading and writing.

Interestingly the same study shows that there exists a relationship between low socio-economic status and low birthweight (Figure 2). A lower score in mathematics is therefore not necessarily due to a weak school system but is in part a reflection of the quality of early child development. The study argues that the foundation for learning mathematics is set in the early years of child development.

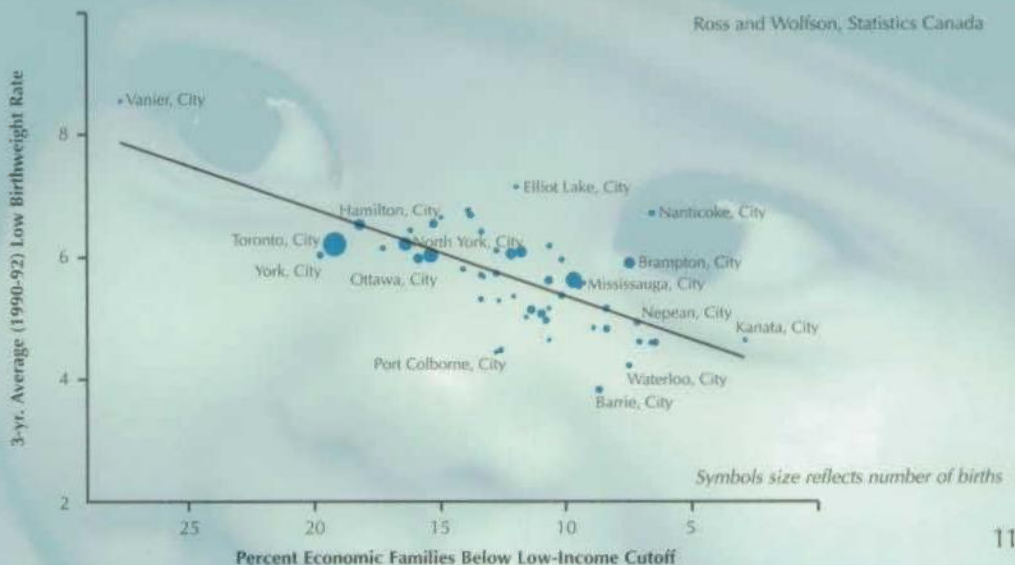
The dots in figure 2 represent city census subdivisions. Their position is determined by the percentage of families below the LICO (low-income cutoff) and the percentage of children scoring below standard. The area of the dots is roughly proportional to the number of students and specifically represents the number of schools. As with mathematics achievement and birthweight, the municipalities of Vanier and Kanata in Ontario, both within the region of Ottawa-Carleton, stand out as being very different.



**FIGURE 1**  
**Grade 3 Math Achievement by Low Income**  
 City Census Subdivisions in Ontario, 1996-97



**FIGURE 2**  
**Low Birthweight by Low Income**  
 City Census Subdivisions in Ontario, 1991





## 4

## Major Household Surveys at Statistics Canada

<b>AETS</b>	Adult Education and Training Survey
<b>APS</b>	Aboriginal Peoples Survey
<b>CTS</b>	Canadian Travel Survey
<b>FOODEX</b>	Family Food Expenditure Survey
	Census of Population
<b>GSS</b>	General Social Surveys
	GSS on Education and Work
	GSS on Families
	GSS on Social Support
	GSS on Time-Use
	GSS on Victimization
<b>HALS</b>	Health and Activity Limitation Survey
<b>HIUS</b>	Household Internet Use Survey
<b>HPS</b>	Health Promotion Survey
<b>HRRS</b>	Homeowners Repair and Renovation Survey
<b>IALS</b>	International Adult Literacy Survey
<b>ITS</b>	International Travel Survey
<b>LFS</b>	Labour Force Survey
<b>NLSCY</b>	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth
<b>NGS</b>	National Graduates Survey
<b>NPHS</b>	National Population Health Survey
<b>NSVGP</b>	National Survey of Volunteering, Giving and Participating
<b>SLS</b>	Schools Levers Survey
<b>SAI</b>	Survey on Ageing and Independence
<b>SCF</b>	Survey of Consumer Finances
<b>SLID</b>	Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics
<b>SFS</b>	Survey of Financial Security
<b>SHS</b>	Survey of Household Spending (incorporates FAMEX and HFE <sup>1</sup> )
<b>SWA</b>	Survey of Work Arrangements
<b>WES</b>	Workplace and Employee Survey
<b>YITS</b>	Longitudinal Youth in Transition Survey

<sup>1</sup>FAMEX: Family Expenditure Survey and HFE: Household Facilities and Equipment Survey