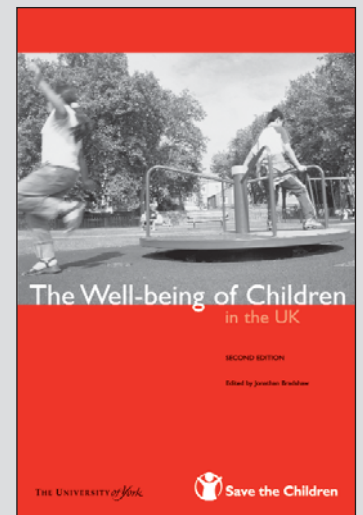


The Well-being of Children in the UK

Second edition

This new and expanded report on *The Well-being of Children in the UK* contains a unique collection of evidence on child well-being across the UK. Commissioned by Save the Children and carried out by researchers at the University of York, the 2005 edition analyses data on 12 key areas of children's lives.

This study, independent of the Government, is UK-wide and offers a critical, discursive review of the available data. It shows that overall child well-being is getting better in line with the wider society, but there are a number of worrying trends. We have seen a negative trend in a range of health indicators; large numbers of children still live in workless households, despite some reduction since 1997; children's use of public space is ever more restricted; and more children are being excluded from school.



Key trends

Child well-being is improving...

- Child poverty rates using a relative measure have been steadily declining since 1999/2000. However, in 2002/3, 28 per cent of children in Britain were still living in poverty.
- Educational attainment has been increasing year on year throughout the last decade and those from working class/manual labour households have shown the most marked improvements.
- Numbers of 16–18-year-olds not in education, employment or training have begun to decline.
- The infant death rate continues to drop across the UK.
- Child pedestrian death and serious injuries are declining among all age groups and for both boys and girls.
- In England, Wales and Scotland, there are signs that youth crime has reached a plateau and may be beginning to fall.

...But not for everyone

- The UK continues to have the highest proportion of children living in workless households in the European Union at 17 per cent – nearly twice the EU average.
- Children's use of public space particularly for younger children has decreased since the 1970s.
- School exclusions have started to increase since the end of the 1990s in England and Wales, although 2002/03 figures show a slight improvement.
- Despite the emphasis on formal measures of literacy and numeracy at key stages in education there is little indication of marked improvements in the numbers reaching or exceeding expected standards.
- A range of health indicators for children and young people have taken a downward trend. This includes the percentage of low birth-weight babies and rates of childhood asthma, diabetes and HIV/AIDS.
- Homelessness among families with children has risen in recent years.



Key child well-being trends at a glance

Improving	No change	Deteriorating
Absolute child poverty Relative child poverty Children in workless families Infant mortality Child accidental deaths Breastfeeding Reporting good health Increased use of contraception Smoking 15–24 suicide rate Domestic violence Time spent with parents Adoptions up Drop in young people leaving care at 16 and 17 Proportion leaving care with one or more GCSE/Standard Grade Daycare nursery places Out of school places Educational qualifications Narrowing class differential in attainment Numbers not in education, employment or training falling Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools English, maths and science at Key Stages 2 and 3 (data not available for Scotland) Truancy Housing conditions	Persistent child poverty Child mortality Whooping cough immunisation Diphtheria, tetanus and polio immunisation Longstanding illness and limited longstanding illness Risky sexual behaviour Teenage conception rate Numbers playing sport 0–14 years suicide number Youth crime Illicit drug use Victimization English, maths and science at Key Stage 1 (data not available for Scotland) Pupils statemented with special needs (or issued with 'records of need' as in Scotland).	School exclusions Playing out/liberty to play Class gap in infant mortality Still-births Low birth-weight MMR vaccination Measles and mumps Asthma, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases Alcohol consumption Obesity Conduct, hyperactive and emotional problems Children born to drug using parents Childminder places Playgroup places Drug and violent crime Girls offending Child homelessness

Poverty and child well-being

There is evidence that the economic and employment status of the household in which a child lives has an impact on key areas of their well-being. However, in general, data are not available that show causal links between poverty and child outcomes.

The study shows that:

- School exclusion rates are now on the increase with higher rates of school exclusions reported for children from low income households (defined as being in receipt of free school meals).
- The UK has one of the highest prevalence rates of asthma in the world and it is increasing, particularly so for children in low income households. The prevalence of doctor-diagnosed asthma was higher for children in households where the main occupation was semi-routine or routine as opposed to managerial.
- Children in low income or ethnic minority households are more likely to live in poor housing. Neighbourhood dissatisfaction is associated with a range of factors including poverty status and social class.
- The gap between infant death rates for different occupational status is widening

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The state of the UK's children

Poverty The child poverty rate in the UK more than doubled during the 1980s, continued to rise slowly during the 1990s and only since 1998/99 has it shown any evidence of declining. Using a relative measure, in 2002/03, 28 per cent of children in Britain lived in poverty. The UK had the fifth highest child poverty rate in the EU in 2001.

Demography The proportion of children within the UK population has fallen from a quarter in 1976 to a fifth in 2002. Rates of childlessness among women have increased dramatically in the last couple of decades. Less than one in ten women born in 1945 remain childless compared with a fifth born in 1965. In 1972, 7 per cent of children lived in lone parent families. In 2003, the figure was 23 per cent.

Physical health While infant and child mortality rates continue to decline in the UK, it still has a higher infant mortality rate than most other European countries. The UK in 2000 had one of the highest proportions of low birthweight live births in the OECD. It is also one of the European countries with the highest number of children being born to HIV infected mothers, and its teenage birth rate is the second highest out of 28 OECD countries.

Lifestyle Nearly a third of young people aged 11–16 in Britain report drinking alcohol during the past week and 20 per cent of young people in the UK smoke regularly. It is estimated that around 16 per cent of English children aged 2 to 15 years are now obese. And just over three in five youngsters aged 11–16 do not undertake the recommended level of physical activity each day.

Mental health Boys are more likely to experience some forms of mental health problems than girls, particularly conduct disorders, while emotional health issues, including unhappiness, are more likely to be experienced by girls. Older children experience more mental health problems than younger children do, irrespective of condition. Suicide is more prevalent among boys than girls and increases with age.

Education Girls continue to outperform boys at school. Boys are four times more likely to be excluded from school than girls. Those excluded from schools are much more likely to be from low income households; to have a statement (or record) of special educational needs; to be 'looked after' by a local authority; and, where data is available on race, to be classified as of Black Minority Ethnic origin.

Housing and neighbourhood While overall and across the UK housing conditions continue to improve, children in low income or ethnic minority households are more likely to live in poor housing than other groups of children. Neighbourhood dissatisfaction is associated with a range of factors, including poverty status and social class. Homelessness, which has particularly harmful effects on children, has risen in recent years, with a high of 169,291 in 2002.

Time and space Around 2.3 million children in England and Wales will have worked before their school leaving age. In England and Wales, 13,700 of 10–11 year olds, 40,000 of 12–14 year olds and 43,000 of 16–17 year olds undertake unpaid domestic care of up to 19 hours a week. Children's use of public spaces has decreased significantly since the 1970s.

Substitute care In 2003, 78,842 children were looked after by the state in the UK, with Scotland having the highest rate of looked after children and Northern Ireland the lowest. Over the past ten years there has been an increase of 23 per cent in the number of looked after children. The main reason for this is that children are being looked after for longer periods.

Crime Adults rather than children or teenagers commit the majority of crimes. Most crimes committed by young people are minor, often offences against property rather than people. A small but growing number of children are responsible for a disproportionate number of offences. The gender gap in offending behaviour is closing, with more girls offending than previously. Children in the UK experience very high levels of victimisation and fear of crime.



The four nations compared

Comparing child well-being across the UK is not always easy. Sometimes data is simply not available at a national level; and where data is available it is not

always comparable. Comparative data for Northern Ireland is particularly problematic, especially when comparing poverty rates. The following table must therefore be treated with care.

Indicator		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
Child poverty*	% children in households with income less than 60% average (before housing costs) (2002/3)	20	25	23	22	
	% children in households with income less than 60% average (after housing costs) (2002/3)	32	30	27	27	
Child health	Infant death rate per 1,000 (2002)	5.2	4.5	5.3	4.7	
	MMR uptake % (2002/3)	82	81	87	89**	
	% low birth-weight births (2002)	7.8	7.3	7.2	6.3	
Teenage pregnancy	Live births per 1,000 women under 20 (2001)	28	35	28	24	
Educational attainment	% achieving 5 or more GCSEs A–C 1–4 (2001/2)	51.6	50.5	60.4	58.7	
	% achieving 2 or more A levels or Highers (2001/2)	37.6	30.6	39.4	43.4	
Smoking	% aged 13 smoking daily (2001/2)	Boys	7	6	3	7
		Girls	9	12	6	10
Alcohol consumption	% aged 13 drinking alcohol weekly (2001/2)	Boys	34	32	19	14
		Girls	25	24	19	6
Mental well-being	% aged 13 with above mean life satisfaction (2001/2)	Boys	88	85	87	78
		Girls	89	81	–	–
	Suicides age 15–24 years, per 100,000 (2002)	Boys		11~	30	18
		Girls		3~	10	1
The home environment	% unfit dwellings	4.2	8.5	0.9	4.9	
	% of 'looked after' children per 1,000 children under 18 (2003)	4.9	5.6	6.0	4.4	
	% of 'looked after' children leaving care at 16/17 (2003)	49	96	90	30	
	% children leaving care aged 16 or over with 1 or more GCSE/GNVQ or Standard Grade/SCQF level 3 (2003)	44	39	42	42	

* There is some controversy over the Northern Ireland Family Resources Survey's (NIFRS) child poverty statistics. Work by Monteith and McLaughlin (2004) on the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (NI) indicates that NI does have a higher rate of child deprivation than the rest of the UK.

** figures for Northern Ireland are for 2001/2
 – data not available
 ~ these figures are not disaggregated for England and Wales.

Conclusion

This review goes a long way towards answering the question, pivotal to government policy, 'Is the well-being of our children in the UK improving or getting worse?' While overall the UK can claim that life is getting better for children, child well-being continues to be mixed: the list of improving indicators is more or less equal in length to the list of deteriorating/no change indicators. Most income/living standard indicators are improving as are most indicators of

educational attainment. However, there are a number of indicators moving in the wrong direction, such as children's use of space, exclusion from schools and health.

These findings, coupled with the lack of evidence in a number of key areas and inconsistent data collection across the UK highlight the need for a state of the nation report for children, presenting a holistic picture of how well our children are doing across the UK.

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What Government needs to do

In the light of the findings from the study, combined with our own research and community experience, Save the Children points to three key areas where the UK and devolved Governments can make a real difference to children's lives:

1. Conduct regular UK-wide and national monitoring of child well-being

The UK does not produce a regular comprehensive analysis of the well being of children. There are entire areas of child well being for which data is simply not available or where data is not comparable across the UK.

We call on Government to:

- **set up a new UK survey of children, in which children are the primary unit of analysis and data is collected on their family, school and neighbourhood**
- **collate data into a routinely produced comprehensive report on the well-being of children in the UK, which measures progress over time and shows comparisons between countries within the UK and, where possible, the rest of Europe.**

2. Tackle child poverty in the UK

More than one in four children in the UK still live in poverty, and the UK has the highest rate in Europe of children living in households where no parents work. Inequality in child outcomes cannot be addressed without tackling child poverty.

We call on Government to:

- **reaffirm the pledge to eradicate child poverty within a generation**
- **publish a clear strategy for how the eradication of child poverty will be achieved**
- **target policies within the next parliament towards those children currently living in severe and persistent poverty, particularly those living in households where neither of the parents/carers can work.**
- **set up a Minimum Income Standards Commission to draw up and review at regular intervals a transparent standard of living for families with children.**

3. Ensure that safe play and quality services are accessible to all children

Across the UK, safe public spaces for children and young people are becoming more restricted, and leisure services are often inaccessible due to location and cost. Consultations with children tell us that this is a major issue for them. Participation in play and leisure is critical to children's emotional well-being and self esteem; it also helps develop vital learning and social skills. Save the Children is particularly concerned that not all children have the same opportunities for safe play and access to quality services. If children are to reach their full potential Government must commit to providing safe public spaces for children and young people particularly in poor neighbourhoods and to providing free access to good quality leisure services for all children.

The Well-being of Children in the UK

Why a new edition of *The Well-being of Children in the UK*?

The 2002 edition of *The Well-being of Children in the UK* opened with the observation that the UK does not produce a regular comprehensive analysis of the well-being of children. This is still true. Save the Children therefore commissioned the University of York to produce this new expanded 2005 edition.

There has been some progress in monitoring and data since 2002. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Executive have all embarked on initiatives aimed at monitoring child outcomes. However, this has not been done in a co-ordinated way across the UK and we still do not have child well-being data that can show progress over time or comparisons between the UK countries and regions.

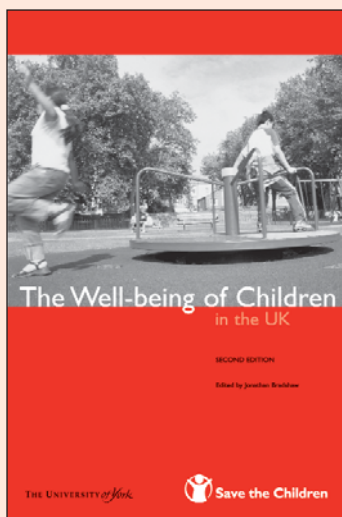
New information on child well-being is also emerging from a range of new datasets, such as the 2001 census, the Family and Child Survey, the Millennium Cohort Study and the Scottish Household Survey. Enhancements to the British Household Panel Survey

in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland for the first time provide national level data. The Northern Ireland Family Resources Survey and the Northern Ireland replication of the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey have also provided new sources of evidence.

Further information

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Key findings as they relate more specifically to England, Wales and Scotland are available. For more information contact the relevant Save the Children offices: England Tel. 0113 3888655, Wales Tel. 02920396838, and Scotland Tel. 0131 527 8200. Or visit Save the Children's website: www.savethechildren.org.uk



How to order the report

The full report, *The Well Being of Children in the UK* (second edition), edited by Jonathan Bradshaw, University of York, is published by Save the Children (price £19.95 plus p&p).

It is available from:
NBN International, Estover Road,
Plymouth PL6 7PY; Tel. 01752 202301;
Email: orders@nbninternational.com

Or order online at
www.savethechildren.org.uk/publications

Save the Children fights for children in the UK and around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence. We work with them to find lifelong answers to the problems they face.

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