



eccdc
early childhood community development centre
Understanding the Early Years

HEALTH & WELL-BEING BRIEF – NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO

Excerpts from preliminary findings of:
Communities Survey (2002, 2005) - Statistics Canada

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a Government of Canada national Initiative aimed at helping communities better understand how their young children are doing physically, socially, and cognitively and how families and the community are supporting their children. The Initiative involves the participation of parents, teachers, schools, school boards, community organizations, and others interested in the well-being of children. Niagara Falls, Ontario is one of seven communities that have participated, since 2001, in the second pilot phase (UEY-II Communities). The other six communities are Hampton, New Brunswick; Montreal, Quebec; Dixie-Bloor of Mississauga, Ontario; South Eastman, Manitoba; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and Abbotsford, British Columbia.

As part of the UEY Initiative, Statistics Canada conducted two rounds of the Communities Survey in Niagara Falls, which was adapted from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The first cycle of data was collected in 2001-2002 and the second in 2004-2005, using the same instruments and data collection procedures. Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) is producing a report that provides an update for the Niagara Falls Community, based on the analysis of these two cycles of data. This report will provide a portrait of kindergarteners in the Niagara Falls Community, in major domains of child development including physical health and well-being, cognitive skills, and behaviours. The report will also explore factors that may be related to children's developmental outcomes, by looking at changes in demographics, family processes, and community factors between 2002 and 2005.

This brief is based on preliminary analysis of the data collected in the Communities Survey, the early childhood developmental outcomes in Niagara Falls, and changes between 2001 and 2005 that are related to health and well-being.

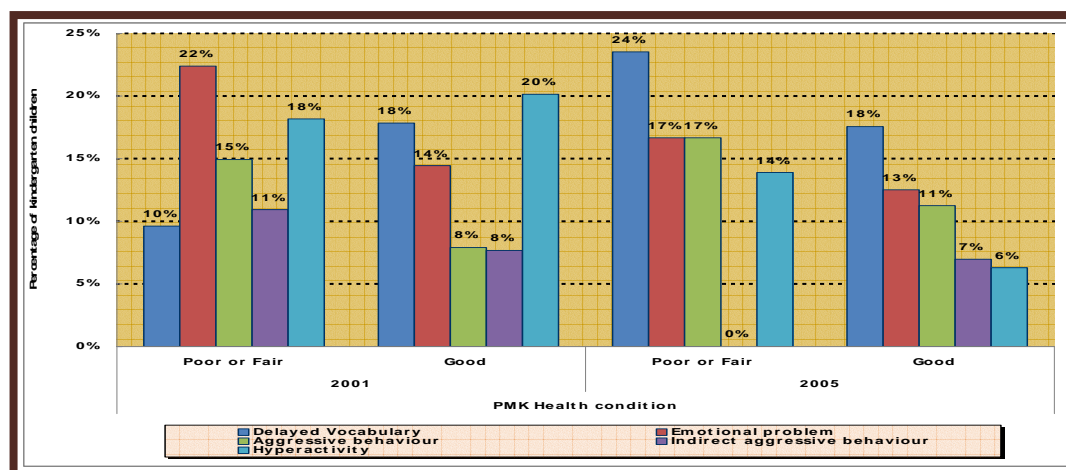
Developmental Outcomes of Young Children of Niagara Falls - Findings from the Communities Survey

- The vast majority of Niagara Falls children continued to enjoy good health in 2005, despite the fact that one in four of them had a long-term condition.
- Children in Niagara Falls showed some improvement over the period of 2001-2005 on measures of emotional development and social behaviours except for the domain of physical aggression.
- The prevalence of hyperactive children used to be very high in Niagara Falls, with one in five children in 2001 showing signs of short attention spans. This prevalence declined considerably and by 2005, only 7% of children in Niagara Falls were found to have signs of inattention problems.
- There was also evidence that the percentages of children showing signs of emotional problems and indirect aggressive behaviours dropped slightly between 2001 and 2005. However, the percentage of Niagara Falls children with aggression problems went up slightly during the same period.
- Overall, judging by the normal levels among the UEY-II communities, Niagara Falls had a lower prevalence of children displaying problematic signs on all four of the behavioural outcomes discussed in this section: emotional development, aggressive behaviours, indirect aggressive behaviours, and hyperactivity.

In 2005, 35% of parents (mostly mothers) reported they had a chronic health condition. Although more than one-third of parents suffered from a long-term health condition, the vast majority of them (over 90%) rated themselves as having generally good to excellent health. The following graph presents the data which explores how parental health status is related to children's developmental outcomes.

It can be seen from the graph below that mothers' poor health could be a risk factor for Niagara Falls children in various aspects, including emotional development and behaviours. In 2001, children with mothers in poor health were more likely than children with mothers in good health to display signs of emotional problems (22% vs. 14%), aggressive behaviours (15% vs. 8%), and indirect aggressive behaviours (11% vs. 8%).

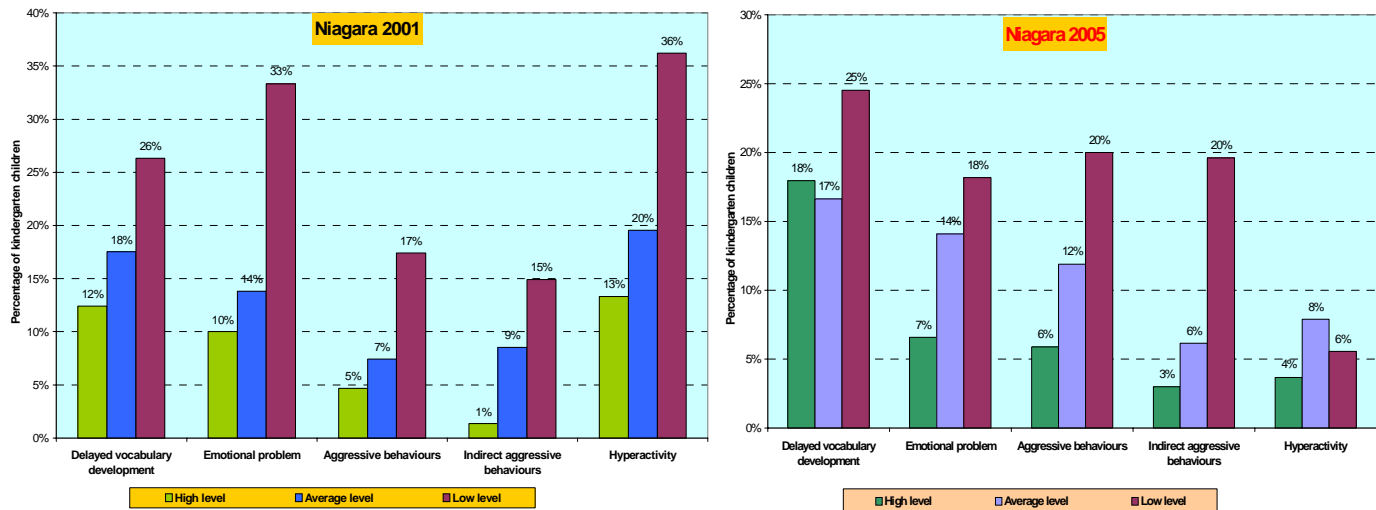
Parents' health status and developmental outcomes of kindergarten children, Niagara Falls, 2001 and 2005



The 2005 data confirmed that mothers' health was related to children's emotional development and aggressive behaviours. In addition, the 2005 results also provided some evidence further confirming that mothers' poor health could be related to children's vocabulary learning and

hyperactivity. The data indicate that children with mothers in poor health could be 1.3 times more likely to be delayed in vocabulary growth and 2.3 times more likely to have short attention spans (hyperactivity), compared to children whose mothers were in good health.

Family Functioning and developmental outcomes of kindergarten children, Niagara Falls



These graphs show how Niagara Falls children's behaviours and cognitive and emotional development were significantly associated with how well their families functioned. Family functioning refers mainly to the cohesiveness and adaptability of the family. It concerns how well the family functions as a cohesive unit, more so than the relationships between spouses or between parents and their children. Information was collected on whether family members were able to communicate, discuss feelings and concerns among themselves, make decisions and solve problems collectively, get along well with each other, and feel accepted for who they are.

The graphs above illustrate the relationship between family functioning and SK children's developmental outcomes. It appears that families with low level functioning may be a risk factor. The results indicate that for Niagara Falls children, both behaviour and cognitive and emotional development were significantly associated with how well their families functioned. For example, in 2001, children from low-level functioning families were above 2 times more likely than those from high-level functioning families to receive low PPVT scores (26% vs. 12%). The corresponding gap in 2005 was 1.4 times (25% vs. 18%). As well, children from low-level functioning families were 3.3 times more likely than children from high-level functioning families to show signs of emotional problems (33% vs. 10%); the corresponding difference dropped to 2.6 times in 2005 (18% vs. 7%).

Summary

The function of UEY projects is to provide community-specific information on:

- the development of kindergarten children;
- family and community factors that influence children's development;
- local programs and services for young children and their families; and
- local socioeconomic characteristics.

With this information, community organizations and individuals can identify gaps in services and programs for young children and their families and foster partnerships among community groups and individuals to make informed decisions about the best programs and services for young children to thrive.

For information on the availability of the full HRSDC community study for Niagara Falls, and other inquiries concerning the Understanding the Early Years, Niagara Falls project, please contact Glory Ressler, Understanding the Early Years Coordinator, by calling 905.646.7311 ext. 319, email gressler@eccdc.org, or visit the website at www.uey.eccdc.org.