

PIDACS FAMILY BACKGROUND & FUNCTIONING BRIEF (June 2008)

As part of the Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Niagara Region project, information was collected from parents, kindergarten children, and their teachers on the development of children in the community, using the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS) and the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The Understanding the Early Years initiative is funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. For further information, visit www.hrsdc.gc.ca.

PIDACS was designed to collect information about children's developmental outcomes and their family and neighbourhood environments and experiences.

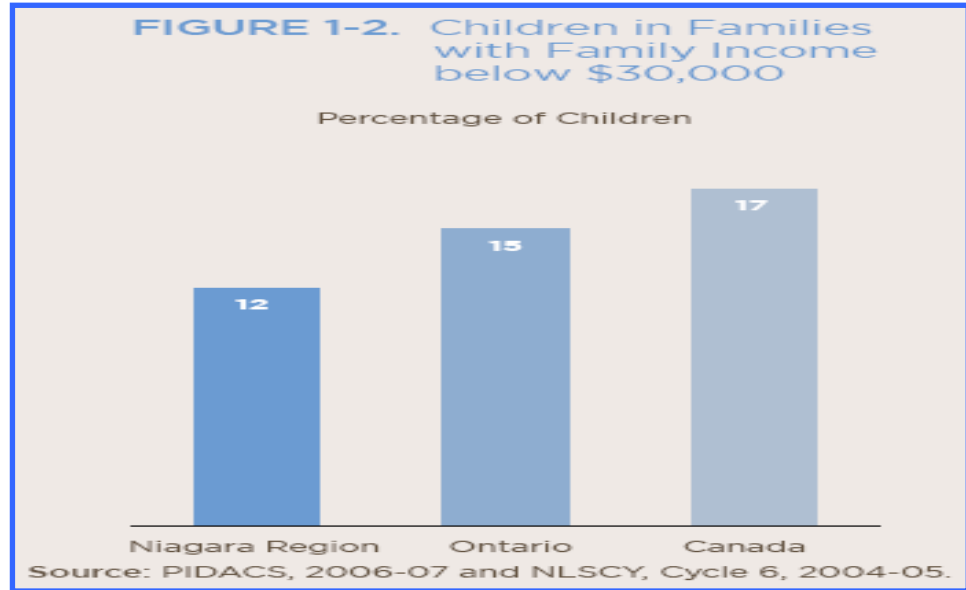
The information presented in this brief is based on a sample of 836 children enrolled in kindergarten in 2006-07 in the Niagara Region (DSBN, NCDSB). Of this sample, 683 parents or guardians were interviewed and 755 children completed the direct assessments. The PIDACS sample size is large enough to provide accurate estimates of the mean scores for the measures of children's outcomes and for various aspects of family and community context.

Results from the preliminary analysis of this data are outlined in the following pages. Additional analysis, at the municipal and neighbourhood levels, is currently underway and will be available in the summer/fall of 2008.

Several studies have examined the effects of living in low-income families and have compared the effects on children when they are in their preschool years, versus when they are older. The results suggest that the risk associated with living in a low income family increases with duration, and that generally the effect during the early years is more detrimental to children than during their elementary or secondary school years. (1. Duncan, G. J., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Klebanov, P. K., Economic deprivation and early child development. *Child Development*, 65, 296-318, 1994. 2. McLeod, J. D. & Nonnemaker, J. M., Poverty and child emotional and behavioral problems: Racial/ethnic differences in processes and effects. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41(2), 137-161, 2000.)

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Figure 1-2 shows that there was a strong relationship between children's developmental outcomes and family income (below \$30,000) for children aged four and five. (Willms, J. D., Socioeconomic gradients for childhood vulnerability. In J. D. Willms (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (pp. 71-102). Edmonton, AB: The University of Alberta Press, 2002.)



In Niagara overall, about 12% of the children in the sample were living in families with annual incomes below \$30,000, which was lower than the provincial and national rates. However, family income is not the sole determinant of children's developmental outcomes.

About 1 in 8 Canadian families with young children are headed by a single parent - usually the mother. Single mothers are more likely to have low levels of education and also experience prolonged periods of low income.

The Niagara Region is somewhat unique in that the parents of the children sampled had relatively high levels of secondary school completion and high rates of employment compared with those in other Canadian communities.

Figure 1-5 shows that about 16% of the children in the Niagara Region sample were living in a single parent family. It is interesting that in Niagara there is higher incidence of single parent families, yet a lower percentage of children living in families with income below \$30,000.

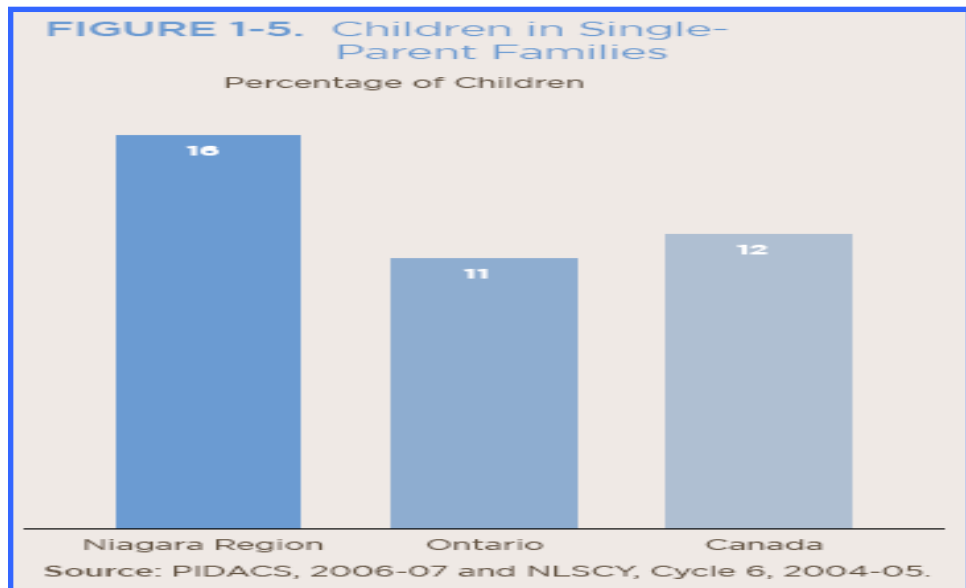


Figure 3-2 shows that parenting practices were generally positive, and on all four measures they were above Canadian norms.

One of the most important aspects of parental engagement with children is reading to the child. In the Niagara Region, 76% of parents read to their child at least once a day. Positive parenting style (authoritative

as opposed to authoritarian or permissive) is a composite measure of *Love and Support* and *Authority* in the PIDACS. Niagara parents/guardians scored above the Canadian norm on both measures. Furthermore, maternal depression was also lower in the Niagara Region compared to the Canadian average.

As the community works towards further developing and implementing its Integrated Action Plan, it can consider strengths and weaknesses uncovered by this PIDACS brief, along with any additional local information available.

The findings of this report may vary among regions within this UEY community. The UEY initiative stresses the importance of a coordinated approach that involves families, teachers/schools, and the wider community to determine the best programs and services to meet children's needs during their formative years.

This report, along with additional information on socioeconomic conditions that may be affecting children 0-6 years of age and their families in Niagara (UEY Niagara Region Mapping Study, 2008), can also be found online at: www.uey.eccdc.org/reports.php.

