

Kids' Quality of Life: What's Up? What's Down?

After years of steady improvement, the quality of life of America's children appears to be at a standstill, according to the Child and Youth Well-Being Index (CWI). The CWI is based on a composite of 28 key indicators of well-being that are grouped into seven quality-of-life domains: family economic well-being, health, safety/behavioral concerns, educational attainment, community connectedness, social relationships, and emotional/spiritual well-being. The CWI has been tracking the well-being of children annually since 1975.

Despite an eight-year upward trend from 1994 through 2002, improvements in the quality of life

of America's children and youth have stalled. The study found that children's health continues to decline largely due to a slowdown in the improvement of child mortality rates and a dramatic rise in the number of children who are obese. The CWI also found that progress in narrowing racial and ethnic disparities has stalled.

On average, children and youth in the U.S. are doing only slightly better today than they did in 1975. And their education results have shown only marginal improvement. The CWI's educational attainment domain, which is based on national mathematics and reading tests, has shown slight improvements in math

scores since 1980, improvements that have accelerated since 1999 at age 9 in both mathematics and reading scores, and at age 13 in mathematics scores. At age 17, however, there is only a slight improvement in mathematics scores, and a slight decline in reading scores since 1980.

On a positive note, children, more than ever before, are safer and engage in less risky behavior. The CWI found a continuing decline in the rates of teen pregnancy, violent crime, and drug and alcohol use among youth.

The CWI's full results are available online at www.newamerica.net/files/2007%20CWI%20Report--Final.pdf.

