

An American study, similarly, demonstrates this link between poverty and violence based on data for the general population and not just for those reported to protection and shelter services.⁽²⁹⁾

Camil Bouchard acknowledges that family violence is not the sole preserve of poor families but he points out that neither is it evenly distributed. He refers to Canadian and American studies which show that more parent-child and spousal conflicts occur where there is unemployment and in lone-parent families, both of which are known to be overrepresented among poor families.

C. Risk Factors as a Link Between Child Poverty and Adult Social Problems

Reports of the research and experience of experts, professionals and others concerned with the welfare of children seem to indicate that they see a strong connection between the unmet needs of poor children and many of our current social ills, e.g., unemployment, physical and mental illness and disability, illiteracy and criminal behaviour. It is argued that the relatively higher exposure of poor children to multiple risk factors in their physical and social environment accounts for this link. The recent report of the Ontario Social Assistance Review says:

A substantive, growing, and disturbing body of literature clearly indicates that poor children are disadvantaged as compared with middle-income children, in health, school performance, emotional adjustment, and participation in extra-curricular activities ... findings even suggest that these differences may be more pronounced for children in families receiving social assistance than for those families that are poor but do not receive social assistance.⁽³⁰⁾

The national coalition on child poverty, as well as others concerned with this issue, point out that, aside from the immorality of child poverty, it has high social and economic costs for society in general. John Ferguson, reporter on business issues, identified child poverty as one of three important economic issues which Canada must solve "if it is to remain prosperous, peaceful and relatively content.....As competition gets tougher, the need for a resilient, adaptive labor force gets even more important."⁽³¹⁾

In a similar vein, David Ross, coauthor of The Fact Book on Poverty, argues that, according to research being done for Health and Welfare Canada, in 1986, each elderly person was supported by five active labour force participants but by the year 2026 this ratio will have fallen to a little over two. This shift, combined with greater international competitiveness, will mean that:

a premium will be placed on achieving the very best education and human resource development of our children. Canada, and especially our retirement income and health systems, will simply not be able to afford one million poor children. Poor children make poor students since it has been shown that the school drop-out rate for children from poor families is 2.2 times that of children for non-poor families. And poorly educated children become poorly educated adults who face increased risks of poverty and a heightened likelihood of passing educational failure on to their children.⁽³²⁾

⁽²⁹⁾ M.A. Straus and R.J. Gelles, "Societal Change in Family Violence from 1975 to 1985 as Revealed in Two National Surveys", Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 48, 1986.

⁽³⁰⁾ Transition, The Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee (the Thomson Report), Toronto, September 1988.

⁽³¹⁾ John Ferguson, Ottawa Citizen, Ottawa, 20 December 1988.

⁽³²⁾ David Ross, Child Poverty in Canada, unpublished paper, Spring 1989, and drawing on the findings reported in Frank Denton and Byron Spencer, "Population Change and the Future Labour Force," January 1987 (part of a study being conducted by Health and Welfare Canada).