

Sociology of Childhood

Kids Count Indicators

In this module we will be examining Kids Count data and assessing the available indicators of the status of children in the United States. Kids Count is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that tracks children on both a national and state-by-state basis measuring educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children. Data collected is available on-line and is used by a variety of individuals and organizations involved with projects such as welfare guidelines, health care initiatives, educational programs, and the development of a system of policy supports that can help parents become more successful both as workers and as parents.

Social indicators are variables that reflect social condition, that is, that “indicate” something about the nature and quality of life in a society. The term is used by the U.S. Census Bureau as well as other researchers.

1. To begin, we will look at the indicators included in The Kids Count data:
 - Child Death Rate
 - Infant Mortality Rate
 - Low Birth Rate
 - Children Living in Poverty
 - Children Percent of Living who Parents Who Do Not have Full Time, Year Round Employment
 - Families with Children Headed by a Single Parent
 - Teens Not Attending Schools and Not Working
 - Teens Who are High School Dropouts
 - Teen Death by Accident, Homicide, and Suicide
 - Teen Birth Rate
 - National Composite Rank

To access the data go to the Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN) Kids Count web site: <http://www.ssdan.net/kidscount/>
Click on Background Reading.

2. For each of the indicators consider the following:
 - a. What does the indicator measure? How is the indicator operationalized?
Note: An operational definition is a description of the way researchers will observe and measure a variable. It presents the criteria used to identify a variable or condition. Operational definitions are essential. They make intersubjectivity (objectivity) possible because they can be replicated, but they are always imperfect.¹

¹ See: Vogt, Paul W. 1993. *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology*. London: Sage Publications.

- b. What issues surround discussion of this indicator?
 - c. How might this indicator be used to inform individuals or organizations with regard to social issues?
 - d. What limitations does the indicator present?
 - e. What additional information would you need to make this indicator more relevant?
3. In order to explore the strengths of each of the indicators use the Kids Count data to examine the well being of the children in our state.
 - a. Go to <http://www.aecf.org> and click on Kids Count Data Book Online.
 - b. Click on Maryland under the heading: Jump to a state profile.
 - c. Examine how Maryland data compares to the national data?
 - d. Where are the greatest differences?
 - e. What explanations can you begin to offer for these differences?
4. Continue exploring the question of the well being of children in Maryland.
 - a. Click on LINE GRAPHS and follow the directives for producing a graph.
 - b. For each of the indicators compare Maryland with the U.S. and a neighboring state or D.C. or your home state.
 - c. In order to generate more variation you may want to click on MAPS and chose a state that has a higher or lower rate than Maryland.
 - d. You may also click on Rankings to choose your comparison area.
 - e. What is the general trend over time for the U.S.?
 - f. Does Maryland conform to this trend?
 - g. What explanations can you generate for these findings?
 - h. What types of policy issues may be linked to these trends?
5. Now that you have examined the data and have a working knowledge of the indicators go back to your considerations of the data in section 2 b-e. Was your original evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the data correct or have you altered your assessment?
 - a. Explain how your intuition