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Impact of Economic Trends and Disparities on South Carolina Children’s Health and Well-being: An Analysis of the 2016 KIDS COUNT Profile

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Introduction

There are many approaches to conceptualizing and measuring the well-being of children. These indices vary considerably depending on the goal of the scale. However, all of these indices share similar characteristics in that they are multi-dimensional and take into account the complexity of children’s lives. One of the best known of these measures is the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s national KIDS COUNT Data Book (http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-2016-kids-count-data-book/). Each year since 1990 the Casey Foundation has released the KIDS COUNT Data Book. This data provides key information about dimensions of child well-being in the following areas: Economic well-being, Education, Health, and Family and Community. The KIDS COUNT index (1) Economic well-being; (2) Education; (3) Health; and (4) Family and Community. The KIDS COUNT Index (2016) is typically transferred into the community through publicly-funded safety net programs (Wheaton, et al., 2016).

The Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Index’s four domains (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016) are: (1) Economic well-being; (2) Education; (3) Health; and (4) Family and Community. The KIDS COUNT index arranges 16 indicators, four per each domain. The index measures the status of child well-being at the state and national levels. KIDS COUNT’s domains premise is that to create effective programs practitioners must work collaboratively across sectors to address the unique needs of communities. The purpose of this article is to examine South Carolina (SC)’s data on dimensions of child well-being in health, education, economic well-being and family and community areas using the KIDS COUNT framework (2016).

Overview of South Carolina 2016 KIDS COUNT data

In 2014, 23% of South Carolina’s population were children under 18 years of age (South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control, 2016). The 2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book showed that SC ranked 41st in the nation in child well-being. SC improved from 45th in 2014 and 2013. The largest gain may come from access to health care. Only six percent (national average) of SC children lacked health insurance in 2014. This is down from 13 percent in 2008. By the state legislature passed a law increasing children’s eligibility for Medicaid. This law allowed parent’s income to reach 200 percent of the federal poverty level. However, the state did little to publicize the law until 2011, when the SC Medicaid agency reformed the application process to make it easier for parents to sign their children up and keep them enrolled (Aiken Standard, 2015). A single parent can earn up to $23,500 annually, and a family of four can earn up to $48,500 and still obtain Medicaid coverage for their children (South Carolina eHealth Medicaid Statistics, 2015). The percentage of low-birth weight infants dropped in SC from 9.7% to 9.4%, and there was also a drop (6% to 5%) in adolescents who abuse drugs and alcohol from 2013 to 2014. There was also a drop in child and adolescent deaths from 35 per 100,000 in 2008 to 31 per 100,000 in 2010. The teen birth rate fell from 51 per 1,000 in 2008 to 28 per 1,000 in 2014. However, SC continued to lag behind the country in other indicators. Since 2008 more children are living in poverty (27%), and a similar trend was found in the percentage of children that are not in school (68%), or no health insurance (68%) (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Economic pressures such as low wage jobs and a lack of secure employment are pervasive across the nation.

In education, where the state ranks 43rd, it is clear that SC is lagging behind much of the nation. Seventy-percent of 4th graders are proficient in reading, 69% of 8th graders are not proficient in math, 59% of children are not attending preschool, and 28% of high school students are not graduating on time. The statistics express itself equally across race-ethnicities in SC. African American 4th and 8th graders are proficient in reading and math, and one-third of black students are not graduating from high school (South Carolina, 2015). A similar indicator by counties is the percentage of children living in poverty in the U.S. SC ranked 37 in terms of child economic well-being in the nation. In South Carolina’s安县, the county of York ranked 1st for having the best percentage for all indicators considered in the KIDS COUNT profile. This county is closely followed by Marion (53.5%) and Williamsburg (49.3%).

Children whose parents lack secure employment

Secure parental employment is the share of all children under the age of 18 living in families where no parent has regular, full-time, year-round employment. Dependent child employment increases family income and reduces poverty. Among poor families, children with working parents are more engaged academically, and less likely to repeat a grade or be suspended or expelled from school than children with non-working parents (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). The percentage of children under the age of 18 living in families where both parents are working in South Carolina dropped from 27% in 2008, to 30% in 2014. Representing more than 22 million children living with parents with unsecured employment, the U.S. In SC 33% of children were living in this condition in 2014 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016).

A similar indicator by counties is the percentage of South Carolina’s children living in families where no parent is in labor force (KIDS COUNT SOUTH Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2015). In South Carolina, 28% (20%) of families, 44% (24%), and Chester (19.2%) accounted for the greatest percentages in the 2010-2012 period.

Children living in households with a high housing cost burden

Children living in households with a high housing cost burden is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in households where more than 30% of monthly household pretax income is spent on housing-related expenses. Children living in poverty level households with working parents are more engaged academically, and less likely to repeat a grade or be suspended or expelled from school than children with non-working parents (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). This county is closely followed by Marion (53.5%) and Williamsburg (49.3%).

Children in poverty

Children in poverty is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold, as issued each year by the U.S. Census Bureau. In calendar year 2014, a family of two adults and two children fell in the poverty category if their annual income fell below $24,008. In 2014, 27% of children in South Carolina can be found at https://www.scdnurses.org/advocacy/and_media/kids_count_south_carolina/data.html . This figure represents a small reduction from 8% in 2008.
Similarly, in SC 8% of teens were not in school and not working in 2014. The indicator decreased slightly by race/ethnicity in SC showed that while 85% of White non-Hispanic youths ages 19 – 26 were in school or working in the period 2010-2012, only 70% of African Americans, and 78% of Latinos were in school or working during this period (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children's Trust of South Carolina, 2014). In the Southern Region, the states with the major form of public schools were the counties with the larger percentage of teens age 16-19 not enrolled in school and not working (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children's Trust of South Carolina, 2015).

Education Indicators and Child Well-being

South Carolina’s average spending per student in public schools was $9,907 in the 2014-2015 school year. The amount of spending per student declined from the 2010-2011 school year to 65% in 2015. In SC, 51 of the child population was living in poverty in 2015 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). This is the domain that is setting the standard for its peers in the Education Domain. The KIDS COUNT INDEX identifies four indicators in the Education domain. These indicators will be explained including children in single-parent families; children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma; children living in high-poverty areas; and, teen births per 1,000.

Children not attending preschool

Young children not in school is the percentage of children ages 3-5 who were not enrolled in school (e.g., nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten). In the period 2012-14, 53% of U.S. children were not attending school. In SC, 56% of young children were not in school (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2015). This is due to low birth weight babies with 6%, even lower than White non-Hispanics (8%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2014).

Fourth graders not proficient in reading

Fourth-graders not proficient in reading is the percentage of fourth-grade public school students who did not reach the proficient level in reading as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The percentage of fourth-graders not proficient in reading decreased nationwide from 68% in 2007, to 65% in 2015. In SC, this percentage was higher than the national average (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). This is the domain that is setting the standard for its peers in the Health Domain. The KIDS COUNT INDEX identifies four indicators in the Health domain. These indicators will be explained including children in single-parent families; children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma; children living in high-poverty areas; and, teen births per 1,000.

Children in single-parent families

Children in single-parent families is the percentage of children under age 18 who live with their own unmarried parent, either in a family or subfamily. In this definition, single-parent families include cohabitating couples or partners who are living in a single-parent household in the 2010-12 period. This figure increased in 2014 to 34% of children living in this situation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). This figure varied by race-ethnicity in SC. African Americans had the greatest percentage (65%) of children living in this situation. Whereas White non-Hispanics had only 25% of children living in a single-parent household; thus significantly lower than the national average (35%). Hispanics were close to the national figure with 33% (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2014). The counties with the higher percentages of children living with single parent families for the period 2009-13, were: Marlboro (65.9%); Marion (63.9%); and, Allendale (62.3%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2015).
Children living in high-poverty areas

Children living in high-poverty areas is the percentage of children under 18 years who live in census tracts where the poverty rates of the total population are 30% or more. In the U.S. this indicator increased from 11% in 2006-10 to 14% in 2010-14. In SC, 15% children were living in high-poverty areas in 2010-14 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). SC’s African American communities had the highest percentage of children living in high-poverty areas (55%), followed by Latinos (44%). White non-Hispanic children registered the lower percentage (23%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2014). The counties with the higher percentage of children living high-poverty areas were: Allendale (100%); Williamsburg (58%); and, Marion (51%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2015).

Teen births per 1,000

Teen births is the number of births to teens between ages 15 to 19 per 1,000 females in this age group. In 2014, the rate of teen births was 28 births per 1,000. Thus, greater than the national average of 24 per 1,000. White non-Hispanic children registered the lower percentage (23%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2014). The indicator of birth to teens 15 to 19 years per 1,000 by counties in SC showed that Allendale (78.3/1,000), Jasper (63.4/1,000), and, Dillon 15 to 19 years per 1,000 by counties in SC showed that (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2015) as compared to 94% of White non-Hispanics in 2010 and 87% of African Americans and Latinos respectively.

30% or more. In the U.S. this indicator increased from 11% in 2006-10 to 14% in 2010-14. In SC, 15% children were living in high-poverty areas in 2010-14 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). SC’s African American communities had the highest percentage of children living in high-poverty areas (55%), followed by Latinos (44%). White non-Hispanic children registered the lower percentage (23%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2014). The counties with the higher percentage of children living high-poverty areas were: Allendale (100%); Williamsburg (58%); and, Marion (51%) (KIDS COUNT South Carolina, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, 2015).

Conclusions

Based on these results, we are recommending a shift in thinking about child well-being policy to a “whole child perspective.” We are also recommending a shift in thinking from disease and treatment-centered health care to one of promoting health and well-being. For too long, health and well-being have been in a silo apart from school and education. This analysis demonstrated that health and education are intertwined when examining child well-being outcomes from a whole child perspective. SCNA members should actively work within their communities and with branches of State government to adopt programs and legislation that will enhance the well-being of all South Carolina children.

References


