

Defining Poverty

The debate over poverty lines is more about values and priorities than about statistical measurements. How we determine poverty and vulnerability reflects our collective values about the kind of society that we want.

Campaign 2000 believes that poverty is a social measure, well beyond a tally of the basic survival needs of children and their families. We are committed to creating an inclusive society that will ensure a place for every child with safe, secure housing; adequate income security policies; high quality, affordable child care; and accessible public education, health and recreation/cultural services. We also know that decent jobs are essential to enable families to support themselves.

Campaign 2000 and others reporting on poverty most frequently use Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). While Canada has no official poverty line, Statistics Canada has noted that the LICO is a consistent way of identifying those who are "substantially worse off than average." A family at or below the LICO is one that spends more than 55% of its income on food, shelter and clothing. [Low Income Cut-offs <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/htmldocument/principales/povertyline.htm>]

Since 1967, the Gallup Public Opinion Polls have asked what Canadians think is the least amount of money that a family of four needs to get along in their community. Canadians' have consistently responded that the LICO is a reasonable estimate of the costs associated with living in their communities.

There is also good evidence that the poverty levels described by the LICO have a clear relationship with children's well-being. Numerous studies have shown that low income children are more than twice as likely to have low levels of vision, hearing, speech, mobility, dexterity, cognition and emotion. They are also less likely to have an annual visit to the dentist and to be exposed to environmental contaminants.

Irrespective of which relative poverty measure we use, child and family poverty continues to be a persistent problem. The diverse partners that comprise Campaign 2000 are more interested in building an inclusive society and enhancing the life chances for children than arguing about poverty lines.

Resources on defining poverty:

A Measure of Poverty in Canada - a guide to the debate about poverty lines (PDF)

Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Public Justice Resource Centre
http://www.cpj.ca/pjrc/research/02_poverty.pdf

Working Definitions of Poverty

(Chapter 2 of CCSD's *The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000*)
<http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2000/fbpov00/chapter2.pdf>

National Council of Welfare responds to Market Basket Measure

<http://www.ncwcnbes.net/htmldocument/principales/MBMpress.htm>

Poverty lines for 2002 and previous years are available at the Canadian Council on Social Development's website at <http://www.ccsd.ca/facts.html>