

Chapter 2

Young People in Contemporary Canada

Abstract People do not exist in a vacuum. Our social environment *conditions* our behaviour by setting limits on our life chances. Put differently, not everyone is born into the same social circumstances, and this inequality of condition sets the boundaries within which people make their lives. If we are to understand the status and behaviour, “good or bad”, of Canada’s youth, we must take account of their social circumstances. This chapter provides an overview of some key economic and social factors affecting young people’s lives.

Young people in late modern societies face a scrutiny that barely conceals a culture of abandonment and ephebiphobia, a term meaning fear or loathing of young people. In the UK and the Netherlands, paraprofessional police are hired to patrol areas where teenagers often “hang out” (Jacobson and Saville 1999; Scott and Services 2002) or videotaped by police in inconspicuous vehicles. In Cincinnati, youth are escorted around malls (see Box 2.1). Also in the United States, Giroux reports that (2009, p. 73) in the state of Washington, fourth grade reading scores and graduation rates are used as a planning tool to determine how many prison cells should be built, a rationality that affirms the well-known link between educational performance and delinquency, but also underscores a banal acceptance of the idea that there is nothing we can do to help children improve school performance, so we might as well plan for failure. In Quebec, convenience stores tested high pitched irritating sound emitters that only people under 25 can hear as a “solution” to the perceived problem of unruly teens (White et al. 2011).

Has Canada created a culture in which control, surveillance, and criminalization of youth trump intelligently designed evidence-based policies focusing on the real causes of youth transgression? In this chapter, I want to provide an analysis of the notion of the risky child. What constitutes such risk? Who are the children who are most at risk, and why? To provide answers to these questions, this chapter examines the status of Canadian children in a number of domains, economic, education, and health, and relates this status to a number of important trends in Canada. It documents the ways in which children and childhood and youth are

conditioned by social relations, at the macro level, focusing particularly on the late modern era (1950s on), and the implications of that conditioning. It also pays attention to the kinds of social support available to children and families, and how this social support in turn was conditioned by macro level social relations. I will turn first to a discussion of the macro level economic characteristics of late modern societies.

Box 2.1 Mall Implements ‘Youth Escort Policy’

Posted: 08/06/2010

By: Adam Marshall

CINCINNATI - As you walk through the doors at Tri-County Mall on a Friday or Saturday night you'll now see security guards checking identification for everyone who looks under 25.

It's all part of the new Youth Escort Policy.

The new rules require anyone under the age of 18 to have an escort with them 21 years of age or older.

The policy applies every Friday and Saturday from 4 p.m. to close.

Management at Tri-County Mall says it should make for a more pleasant shopping experience for their customers.

"Being youth, and being in large numbers unsupervised, they tend to get loud and rowdy and detract from a comfortable shopping atmosphere.," said General Manager Michael Lyons.

To enforce the rules, there will be extra security at every entrance of the mall.

Some customers say the new rules are not necessary, while others agree with what mall management is trying to do.

"To this extent? Wristbands and security at every door, it's not fair. It's not right," said 18 year-old Jahnise Bowie.

"Doing nothing but hanging out that that can be disruptive and therefore I'm OK with that part of it. But on the other hand, if you have a teenager that is here to shop, and that person is here to just pick up an item or two, I think he or she should be able to do that as well," said customer Derwin Jamison. Management says they understand not everyone will be thrilled with the new policy, however the long-term effect on mall business should be positive.

"I think it's important to remember that this program is only going to be in place Friday evenings and Saturday evenings. There are five other days when the program isn't going to be in place at all," Lyons said.

Other facilities in the area do have similar policies, however none are this strict.

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Capitalism, Late Modernity and Youth

A number of scholars have recently been preoccupied with explaining the contours and consequences of social problems within the context of late modernity. Writers such as Young (2007b), Bauman (2000; 2005) and Beck (1992) have argued that the conditions of life in the present period are fundamentally different from those that existed in the Post World War II era, mainly in terms of the centrality of social exclusion as a mode of organizing people, and within the context of the rise of neo-liberalism, a term that I define following Giroux (2004, p. 13) who characterizes it as a “virulent and brutal form of market capitalism...[in which] everything is for sale or plundered for profit.” David Harvey (Harvey 2010, p. 10) argues further that the term refers to:

...a class project that coalesced in the crisis of the 1970s. Masked by a lot of rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility, and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade, it legitimized draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power. This project has been successful, judging by the incredible centralization of wealth and power observable in all those countries that took the neoliberal road. And there is no evidence that it is dead.

Thus, for these and other commentators, the current period of *late modernity*—the term I will use to characterize the era throughout this book—is one in which the rise of individualism, and the concomitant phenomenon of responsabilization are rooted in a globalized neo-liberal ethos existing side by side with neo-conservative political and economic strategies, including managerialism and risk management (Muncie 2006). Building on the work of Eric Hobsbawm and Stan Cohen, Young (2007a) maintains that in contrast to the two decades of prosperity and relative stability following the Second World War, the late 1960s witnessed an unraveling of these stable relations, fueled by a cultural revolution and fundamental economic restructuring which essentially transformed societies and global relations. In the midst of these transformations, youth came to be seen as the harbingers of new cultural forms that were in many respects seen as alien and disagreeable by the adults around them. Indeed, youth themselves were active agents in this process, a point, Young reminds us, often ignored in the moral panic literature, but critical to understanding youth acts of deviance as intentional and “fun” (Katz 1988). In this dialectic of the moral panic over youth (captured by the oft-heard term, “what is wrong with young people today?”) and young people’s active resistance and even enjoyment of the world they were creating, adults felt that the stable, disciplined, and predictable world as they had known it was slipping away (Young 2007a).

More recently, a new kind of moral panic and othering has occurred in a set of new contexts. The steady decline in manufacturing industries in Western societies and the corresponding rise of menial, dead-end jobs in the service sector (most of which offer minimal or no benefits, low wages, and no job security), has created a culture of resentment and a “generalized feeling of unfairness, a failure of meritocracy which is underscored by widespread redundancies and changes in career”

(Young 2007b, p. 4). The response to this, he argues, is two variants of othering. Conservative othering “projects negative attributes on the other and thereby grants positive attributes to oneself” (Young 2007b, p. 5). Liberal othering, on the other hand, is less likely to be acknowledged, and occurs when “the other is seen to lack our qualities and virtues...as a deficit which is caused by a deprivation of material or cultural circumstances or capital. They would be *just like us* if these circumstances improved” (Young 2007b, p. 5). In effect, today adults are not scared of the loss of discipline and predictability in the face of cultural transformation experienced in the 1960s, we are instead worried about the loss of jobs and income security, a middle class “vertigo” or “fear of falling” from the hitherto contended, but increasingly precarious ranks of the middle classes (Ehrenreich 1990).

These transformations are fundamentally different from other historical periods because the political economic conditions that now prevail in Western societies, including Canada, are fundamentally different than they were during the post-war period. To illustrate, let us turn to David Harvey’s analysis of the political economy of the current age. Harvey (Harvey 2010, pp. 40–46) reminds us that capital is a process by which money goes in search of more money. There are many ways that this process can be realized, including finance markets, production of goods and services, and rent on property. The dominant form of capital circulation for a very long time has involved the production of goods, in which the capitalist provides capital input to purchase materials, labour, and the tools of production, which then are deployed to create goods, which in turn are sold in the market for a profit. A fraction of those profits are then reinvested in the process as fresh capital so that the process can begin again. Two central principles driving the success of this process are the speed and spatial circulation of capital. In other words, the faster a factory can make goods without sacrificing quality, using new technologies in particular, the more likely they are to accrue higher profits at the expense of their competitors. At the same time, if money is invested in technologies or labour that exist in a location that must be used in a different place, it is imperative that those technologies or labour power can be deployed with a minimal amount of delay due to geographical constraints. Similarly, geographical barriers to trade can greatly impede the realization of profits.

Harvey goes on to argue that historically, and notwithstanding the role of counteracting tendencies such as protectionism, war or other crises, there has been a general trend towards the elimination of spatial barriers and an increase in the velocity of money. One consequence of these trends is an increase in surplus capital seeking reinvestment to fuel continued growth. If such growth is blocked, then capital over-accumulates and becomes devalued, taking the concrete form of closed factories, abandoned businesses, and a surfeit of commodities that cannot be sold. In turn, rates of return on investment are reduced or eliminated altogether, and the value of stocks, shares, and property declines.

What are the social correlates of this process? While capitalism has proven to be remarkably resilient over the past 200 years, this resilience has not come without costs, sometimes violent ones. One associated consequence has been the concentration of wealth in the hands of a minority at the expense of the vast

majority of working and middle class people. Indeed, the paradox of capitalism has been that it has created astonishing wealth to the tune of \$2.4 trillion dollars in the hands of 793 billionaires as of 2009 (of whom 20 were Canadian), and shameful poverty in the hands of the 40% of the working poor in the world who work for less than \$2 a day (Therborn 2011, p. 190). Another has been state intervention to sustain failing businesses via bailouts as most recently occurred in the 2008 crisis. Wars are fought to secure new markets, geopolitical advantage, or sources of raw materials. And, when capital sits idle, it becomes important to find new ways to encourage consumers to buy, which in turn is the major motivation for the rise of the massive credit industry, and the trillions of dollars spent on advertising every year. Thus, capitalism has reached a point in history where capitalist states (which are far more than governments) are now irrevocably yoked to business ideology and goals. And these goals increasingly trump the needs of families, youth, and children through a dual process in which fewer financial and social resources are made available for those in need via the dismantling of the welfare state, while at the same time those same people are told that they are responsible for their own well-being. Thus, we are witnessing an individualization of social problems coupled with demonization of those who are most at risk of experiencing the consequences of those problems. In the meantime, running apace, is a culture of fear of the dangerous “other,” who are very often youth, cheerfully replicated and amplified by the popular media.

But what does this short analysis of the logics of the capitalist mode of production and the ideology that accompanies it have to do with justice for children and youth? There are many ways to connect these processes with the lives of young people, and I first want to address the issue of income and wealth disparity.

The Economic Status of Youth and Their Families

Children are poor because their families are poor. When families are economically disadvantaged, their children face reduced opportunities to participate in legitimate everyday life. Moreover, there is now incontrovertible evidence that children who receive proper care, nurturance, food, and social support enjoy far greater advantages as they move through the life-course. Economic instability, glossed over by the media and the state by the ideology of the “new” economy and the “inevitability” of hard choices has created immense hardship for many Canadian families. Economic instability not only creates under- and unemployment it has also forced many people to work at two or more jobs, and to work harder and faster, for less pay, and diminished or non-existent benefits. According to the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network (Arundel 2009, p. 5):

...22 percent of all Canadian workers earned two-thirds or less of the median earnings for Canadians. And the proportion of low wage workers is growing: between 2000 and 2008, the proportion of minimum wage jobs grew from 4.7 percent to 5.2 percent of all jobs and the number working at minimum wage grew by three quarters of a million workers. While

many of these jobs may be held by young people starting out, four in ten of them in 2007 were held by people over the age of 25 years.

Thus, while some people are economically speaking, “treading water”, many others end up falling through the cracks of the economic system, creating higher rates of family stress, poverty, disenfranchisement, resentment, and bitterness.

The most recent recession, which some commentators are calling the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s, was due mostly to rash lending practices in the sub-prime mortgage sector of the US economy which forced some lending institutions into bankruptcy and necessitated bailouts to others from the US government. Consequently, stock markets worldwide crashed, creating a global recession (Arsenault and Sharpe 2009). Despite historical evidence that tax cuts to businesses do not promote investment (Stanford 2011), the Canadian federal government continues to insist otherwise, taking refuge in tried neo-liberal economic policies, while broadcasting Canada’s resilience in the face of the recession (See Box 2.2). Yet, data on the well-being of vulnerable groups, including youth, indicate that many aspects of these people’s lives have gotten worse over the years prior to the recession, and in many domains of well-being their problems have amplified post recession.

Box 2.2. Update: Canada’s Flaherty: Economy Remains Government’s Top Priority

January 13, 2011

By Karen Johnson Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

VAUGHAN, Ont. (Dow Jones)—Canada’s Economic Action Plan continues to create jobs and stimulate growth, Canadian Finance Minister Jim Flaherty said Monday.

“The economy remains our government’s number one priority, and with the global economy still fragile, we continue to focus on creating jobs and economic growth,” Flaherty said, speaking at the Earth Rangers nature and education center outside of Toronto.

Flaherty was delivering the seventh report on the Economic Action Plan—a \$60 billion boost to the Canadian economy announced in 2009. He said the action plan shielded Canadians from “the worst of the financial crisis” and “is now positioning Canada to succeed in what is a highly competitive economy.”

He said the Conservative government remains “committed to keeping taxes low for job creators.” He said in its previous two budgets, the Conservative government has announced the elimination of all remaining tariffs on machinery and equipment and manufacturing inputs. He called it a “permanent benefit that sets our nation apart for all the right reasons,” Flaherty said.

“Canada will be the first tariff-free zone for industrial manufacturers in the entire G20,” Flaherty said.

Flaherty also said reducing the corporate tax rate helps stimulate job growth and investment. The federal rate was lowered this year to 16.5%, from 18% last year. It’s slated to drop to 15% next year.

The main opposition Liberal party has called for the tax cut to be rolled back, saying it’s not affordable as Canada seeks to balance its budget over the medium term.

The 2011 budget, which Flaherty said will be released sometime in March, is expected to be controversial and could trigger an election. It would be the third election in five years.

Canada is on track to return to balanced budgets ahead of its G7 peers, job creation is close to 400,000 jobs—nearly 85% of them full-time—virtually offsetting all of the jobs lost during the recession.

“Two years after introducing the Economic Action Plan, Canada has come out of the global darkness in the strongest position in the [Group of Seven leading nations],” Flaherty said.

He said there are two major threats to the Canadian economy: weakness in U.S. consumer spending and the instability in some euro-zone nations.

“Without question, global economic stability is far from assured,” he said. Citing “candid conversations” with other world leaders at the World Economic Forum over the weekend in Davos, Switzerland, Flaherty said “the world is not lacking in challenges.”

“Other nations continue to grapple with potentially unsustainable public debt loads and lingering concerns about their financial systems,” he said.

Such instability globally makes Canada’s performance “all the more remarkable,” he said.

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In addition to high unemployment and under-employment, other indicators point to a system that is failing youth and children. While the incidence of child poverty has dropped since the 1990s, approximately 1 in 10 children still live below the poverty line (see Table 2.1) despite a House of Commons resolution in 1989 to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. About one-third of these children belong to families where a parent is working full time (Campaign 2000, 2010). Not surprisingly, child poverty rates have historically increased during, and in the aftermath of recessions (Yalnizyan, 2010). The problem is far worse for Aboriginal children. In cities of more than 100,000, half of the Aboriginal children under 15 live in low-income housing compared to one in five for non-Aboriginal children (Unicef 2009).

The negative impact of poverty on children has been well documented and include lower educational attainment, poor health, cognitive, and behavioural

Table 2.1 Incidence of child poverty by province, Canada, 1990–2004

Province	Year											
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Newfoundland	20.8	20.6	26.8	21.8	23.4	26.2	20.2	17.7	13.7	14.0	15.8	12.8
PEI	14.0	15.6	12.7	11.4	13.3	14.2	18.5	7.7	5.8	7.1	4.7	4.6
Nova Scotia	16.8	20.6	19.4	23.4	20.5	21.5	23.5	12.5	13.3	12.7	14.4	11.9
New Brunswick	18.6	19.2	15.9	18.0	18.3	24.4	19.8	10.5	9.5	10.3	10.9	8.8
Québec	19.5	20.4	19.3	21.4	19.8	22.6	22.0	16.0	14.5	11.3	10.9	10.9
Ontario	14.8	17.3	16.3	20.8	18.1	19.1	20.3	12.8	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.8
Manitoba	24	30.9	24.2	26.1	22.8	23.2	26.6	16.7	15.6	16.2	16.9	12.8
Saskatchewan	21.8	22.4	24.0	24.8	22.9	21.8	22.3	13.0	10.7	8.9	12.9	10.9
Alberta	19.8	19.2	24.5	20.6	18.5	21.7	20.7	12.3	10.9	9.2	11.0	11.7
British Columbia	17.6	14.4	19.3	21.5	21.2	20.8	20.2	14.1	14.0	18.3	18.7	18.1
Canada	17.8	18.9	19.2	21.3	19.5	21.0	21.1	13.8	12.1	12.2	12.5	12.8

Source Prepared by the Centre for International Statistics at the Canadian Council on Social Development, using data from Statistics Canada, Cat. 13-569-XPB for years 1990 to 1996, and Statistics Canada, Income Trends in Canada 2004, Cat. 75-202-XIE for years 2000 to 2004

Note Children under 18 years of age. Based on Statistics Canada's Low-income Cut-offs, 1992 base

problems that will often shape and determine a young person's life course (Willms, 2002), including delinquent and criminal behaviour (Jarjoura, Triplett and Brinker, 2002)

If children's parents are having difficulty finding and keeping meaningful, well-paying work, the same can be said for young people of working age. Between 1984 and 1994 the real median income of young people fell by 23%, and the unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 24 has consistently been double the rates for adults (Rehnbj and McBride 1997). Between 1989 and 1999, following a recession at the beginning of the decade, the proportion of 16-year-olds who had never had a job increased from 26 to 58% (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999). At the same time, the average young person in Canada earned less in 1997 than they were earning in the 1980s, reflecting a shift in the nature of work towards low-paying, part-time jobs as food servers and store clerks (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1999). Further, the participation of young people in the labour market dropped by over 10 % in the 1990s alone, and the gap between the youth and overall employment rates continues to grow. Overall, unemployment rates for young people attending school, as illustrated in Fig. 2.1 have remained high in Canada for the past three decades.

In past economic downturns, many Canadians were able to cope with unemployment because of the Unemployment Insurance scheme that had been in place. But as Yalnizyan (2009, p. 5) remarks, by the 1990s, the policy (now renamed Employment Insurance) had been "gutted," such that:

In the last recession, 85% of unemployed men and 81% of unemployed women could rely on benefits if they lost their job; today only 45% of men and 39% of women can. The last time the unemployed were this exposed to economic risk was in the 1940s.

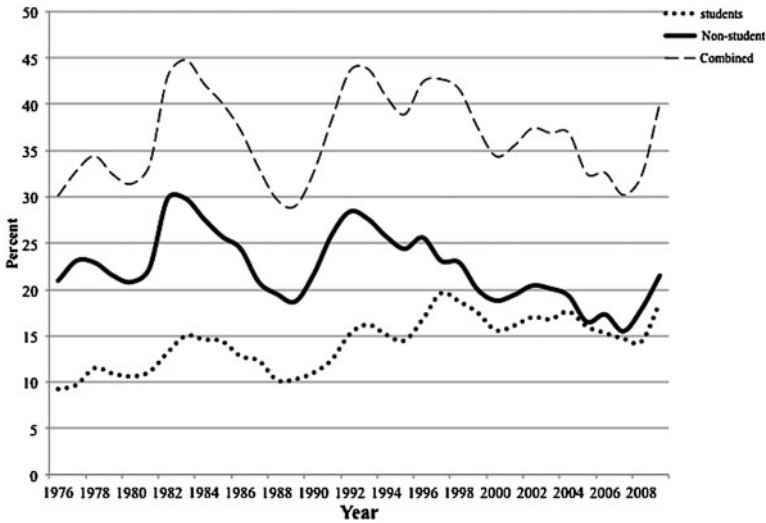


Fig. 2.1 Canada unemployment rate: Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by full- and part-time students age 15–19, during school months, unadjusted for seasonality, computed annual average, 1976–2009 *Source* Derived from: Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0005-Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by full- and part-time students during school months, sex and age group, unadjusted for seasonality, computed annual average (persons unless otherwise noted)*, CANSIM (database), Using E-STAT (distributor)http://estat.statcan.gc.ca.uproxy.library.dc-uoit.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat/English/CIL_1-eng.htm

The unemployment problem is even more acute for recent (within the past five years) immigrants to Canada. Among those immigrants with university degrees, the rate of unemployment was more than four times that of non-immigrants with degrees in 2009 (2010). An aging population, declining fertility rates, and overall smaller families has driven aggressive immigration policies such that Canada now accepts nearly a quarter of a million newcomers per year. Thus, the Community Foundations of Canada group states that immigration will become the sole source of population growth by 2030 (2010, pp. 2–3). Because of the way that Canada’s immigration laws are structured, many people admitted to the country are highly educated and skilled, yet they face numerous obstacles to participation in work life, including language barriers, lack of work experience, and non-recognition of professional designations or qualifications. Indeed, only about one quarter of these workers are working in the fields they were trained in, compared to nearly two-thirds of Canadian born workers (2010, p. 3).

Late modern economies require technical skills and expertise, yet young people are being forced into a “prolonged state of social marginality” (Petersen and Mortimer 1994). In effect, although employment during adolescence could provide significant experiences for growth into later work roles, as well as a sense of belonging to the conventional social order, for some time now Canadian society has been unable to provide many youth with such meaningful work experiences.

Ironically, though youth unemployment is high, our society places tremendous pressures on youth to consume goods and services that they may not be able to afford. In 2005, Canadian youth spent \$2.9 billion of their own money, more than double of what they spent in 1995, and influenced the purchasing habits of their parents to the tune of more than \$20 billion (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2006). As Caston(1998)points out, along with the family and schools, advertising is one of the most important agents of socialization in our society, and thus fosters:

...a market orientation by depicting consumption as an end in itself and as a measure of social status and human value. Whether it is hawking overpriced designer jeans and underwear, prescription drugs, credit cards, or any one of tens of thousands of other products and services, advertising's messages to us are "be a consumer," "spend it now," "live for today," "your worth is measured by the name brands you buy." (1998, p. 248)

At the same time that young people are told that they have "multiple choice freedoms," (Côté and Allahar 2006, p. 78) then, they are also being told that such freedom belongs in the realm of choice over the numerous empty status symbols constituting youth markets. And as Cote and Allahar argue, they are also told that they are responsible for their own choices and destinies, but as the arguments that follow will show, many do not have access to the kinds of legitimate opportunities that foster success.

Families also look very different than they did four decades ago. The main family form between the early 1900s and the 1950s was what is sometimes called the "traditional nuclear" family, consisting of a mother at home, a working father, and usually two or more children. In 1981 the majority (84%) of children lived with married parents, but this dropped to just over two-thirds by 2001 (See Table 2.2). As of 2000, almost 279,000 children under the age of 12 lived in blended families, and another 733,000 under age 15 lived with common law parents, more than four times the proportion in 1981. In addition, birth rates have remained low in Canada for decades, and families have become smaller than they were in the 1950s and 1960s (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006).

In addition, the majority (85%) of two-parent families are dual income couples, and two-thirds of women with young children under the age of 6 are employed. Yet most have very little economic security because real incomes (income in constant dollars) have remained relatively stable since the 1990s (See Table 2.3) and female lone parents consistently earn less than their male or two parent counterparts. In other words, many families are working twice as hard to maintain the standard of living they would have enjoyed nearly 20 years ago. This pressure is compounded by the enormous debt load being carried by most Canadian families, who between 1984 and 2009 more than doubled their household debt. Again, lone parent families suffered the highest debt-to-income ratios (Hurst 2011).

Other factors have contributed to changes in the nature of families. Divorce rates rose dramatically in Canada when the country liberalized its divorce laws in the 1960s. This is not to say, of course, that divorced parents are any less likely to provide a loving, nurturing environment in which children can grow up. However, divorce does have some important implications for family life. For instance,

Table 2.2 Distribution of children aged 0–11 by family type, 1981 and 2001

Family type	1981	1991	2001
Living with married parents	84	77	68
Living with common-law parents	3	7	13
Living with a lone parent	13	18	19

Source Adapted from (Jenson 2003, p. 40)

research in both Canada and the United States has consistently shown that women fare far worse economically than men after divorce, and that in fact, the economic status of males after divorce actually improves (Finnie 1993; Smock 1993, 1994). Thus, the experience of divorce is economically gendered. Another consequence of the unequal experience of divorce is that many single-parent female headed families experience high rates of poverty (Casper et al. 1994). In fact, in 2008, the child poverty rate was 38% for female-led single parent families, while about half of female lone mothers with children under the age of six live in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2010).

Thus, according to Eshlemen (1997, p. 241):
Single parent families are characterized by a high rate of poverty, a high percentage age of minority representation, more dependents, relatively low education, and a high rate of mobility...psychologically, single parents are more depressed, are more anxious, have poorer self images, and are less satisfied with their lives.

Recent data from an ongoing national survey of young people in Canada indicate that many children from single mother, poor families suffer a range of problems, many of which are linked to deviant behaviour (See Table 2.4). The important point here is that while such problems occur in high and low income families, it is the most disadvantaged families that seem to experience them the most. This does not mean however, that criminal or deviant behaviour is a property of the “lower classes,” but it does mean that children living in such circumstances face higher risks for criminal behaviour.

It might seem obvious that children are adversely affected by divorce. However, there is some controversy over this view. It is true that divorce has negative economic and social consequences for children. For instance, as Eshleman (1997) points out, adolescents from divorced homes are less likely to graduate from high school, have a lower probability of ever marrying, and greater chances of getting divorced themselves. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that children from such homes are more likely to commit crime, and experience problems in relating to peers (Juby and Farrington 2001; Wells and Ranken 1991).

What is uncertain is the extent to which such problems actually come from the *relationships* between family members *during* the marriage. It may be, then, that parental conflict, abuse, or persistent economic stress may actually be the factors that influence children in negative ways, and not the actual strain of divorce and separation itself. Indeed, the Caledon Institute (Jamieson and Hart, 2003, p. 3) reminds us that:

Table 2.3 Average income after tax by family type 1989–2008

Year	Two parent families with children	Male lone-parent families	Female lone-parent families
Constant 2008 \$			
1989	66,900	53,600	31,900
1990	65,100	44,500	28,900
1991	63,000	42,000	28,100
1992	64,100	42,800	29,100
1993	61,800	39,200	28,600
1994	62,900	39,300	29,900
1995	62,700	39,200	29,800
1996	63,000	41,500	27,800
1997	64,100	40,900	28,500
1998	68,000	44,500	30,000
1999	70,200	44,600	31,300
2000	72,800	48,100	33,600
2001	75,500	46,800	35,400
2002	76,200	47,500	33,000
2003	76,800	50,500	33,200
2004	79,600	48,100	34,000
2005	77,900	54,900	38,400
2006	79,900	57,000	38,700
2007	83,900	53,300	40,400
2008	84,900	54,200	41,300

Source Adapted from Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 202-0603 and Catalogue no. 75-202-X

...crime stems from a variety of critical experiences in people’s lives: family violence; poor parenting; negative school experiences; poor housing; a lack of recreational, health and environmental facilities; inadequate social support; peer pressure; unemployment; and lack of opportunity and poverty. [A social development approach to dealing with crime]...emphasizes investing in individuals, families and communities by providing social, recreational, educational and economic interventions and support programs for those Canadians, mainly young people, who are most at risk of becoming involved in crime, before they come into conflict with the law.

Regardless of the implications of such debates, it is clear that many Canadian youth are today more likely to grow up in single-parent female headed homes than their predecessors a generation ago. These family circumstances place them at some risk of experiencing poverty and a host of other social pathologies, including criminality. It should be noted that the absence of a male parent is not the reason these children are more at risk. Rather, they are at risk because single-parent mothers are far more likely to be poor or working for low wages. To be sure, there are also young people in Canada who do not experience such deprivation, and whose paths to higher social and economic status seem less littered with obstacles. As we shall see, however, although criminal behaviour cuts across income levels, poor youth are significantly more “at risk” of encountering the criminal justice process (Bartollas 1997).

Table 2.4 Rates of problems for children from single-mother families compared with those of children from two-parent families, by income

Type of problem	Rates of problems by income (%)			
	Low income		Not low income	
	Single mother	Two parent	Single mother	Two parent
Hyperactivity	16.7	9.6	13.7	9.6
Conduct Disorder	19.2	9.2	13.2	7.9
Emotional Disorder	16.7	8.6	11.6	7.3
One or more behaviour problems	33.5	21.0	27.9	18.3
Repeated a grade	12.5	7.9	9.1	4.1
Social impairment	7.4	4.6	3.8	2.1
One or more total problems ^a	43.5	28.9	35.8	22.6

Source Adapted from Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996: 88
^a Data available for 6–11-year-old children only. All other variables use data from 4- to 11-year-old children

Moreover, the recent crisis of capitalism will undoubtedly result in higher rates of poverty and misery for many Canadian children and their families, and, as Arsenault and Sharpe (2009, p. 29) maintain, “it will be many years before we return to the unemployment and poverty levels enjoyed before the recession hit.”

Education

As numerous studies have pointed out, the young person’s experience of school is an important factor in understanding youth crime (Lochner and Moretti 2001). According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1998), “lack of attachment to school is a significant risk factor in youth crime,” primarily because such individuals are more likely to experience under- or unemployment, and are more likely to become involved with high risk behaviours such as regular alcohol or drug use. About one in five (18%) of youth between 18 and 20 left school without graduating in 1991 for a variety of reasons including, boredom, the perception that school rules are too stringent, associating with peers who attach little value to education, and for many teenage girls, pregnancy (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1998, p. 58). Today, about 7 million people of working age in Canada do not possess the literacy skills required to participate in the workforce, and nearly a third of young people read at a level 3 reading proficiency (on a scale of 5) (Arundel et al. 2009).

However, most Canadian children go to school, do reasonably well there, and go on to attend institutions of higher education. In 1994, there were 5.5 million students in elementary and high schools—almost 100% enrolment. Canada also has one of the highest enrolments in post-secondary institutions among industrialized countries. In 1994, there were 1.5 million students, or 53% of youth aged 18

to 24, enrolled in colleges, technical institutes, or universities on a part-time or full-time basis, and by 2001, almost three quarters of young people between the ages of 20 and 22 had participated in post secondary education (Lambert et al. 2004). Still, the education system is changing. Consider the following facts:

- Recent provincial cutbacks mean that many parents of elementary and secondary school students must now pay user fees for activities that were previously free, including cultural and sporting activities and special services such as speech therapy. Compulsory fees in Canadian universities have risen by 7% in 2010/11 compared to one year earlier. In 2002, two parent families spent an average of \$1,464 on education-related expenses, an increase of 23% from 1999 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006, p. 18)
- At the post-secondary level, tuition fees are rising; Nearly half of post-secondary students require government loans to finance their education. In 2005, 44% of all graduates from college and university were in debt to government student loan programs and owed an average of \$16,500 (Canada).
- Despite some progress in funding for kindergarten programs across Canada, we lag far behind most European countries where universal educational programs are provided for children aged three to five (Ontario 2008).
- A study of 9-year olds in the National Longitudinal survey of Youth found that those living in low income households tended to have lower achievement than children from more affluent households on many measures (Thomas 2009).

These data illustrate the changing nature of the Canadian educational system. They are important because of the positive association between education and the type of job one can expect to hold in adulthood. In addition, however, it is clear that poorer children are the ones who will be most affected by some of the recent shifts described above. For instance, we know that poverty negatively affects family functioning and children's school results. Data from the 1994 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth "indicates that rates of family dysfunction and parental depression are higher in poor families than in more affluent families, and that poor children do not have the same scholastic and verbal skills entering school as their non-poor peers" (Canadian Council on Social Development 1997, p. 1).

Health

As with income inequality, there is increasing health disparity in Canada (Unicef 2009), and the two issues are related. The most recent report on the health of school-age children in Canada notes that despite some reductions from 2002 in consumption of sweets, daily smoking, drinking alcohol, trying cannabis, and sexual harassment, there are still some troubling issues (Boyce et al. 2007, pp 9):

- Almost half of Grade 6–10 young people in Canada are physically inactive, with the problem being particularly worrisome in girls and older students.

- Fewer than half of students indicate that they consume fruits or vegetables at least once a day.
- Approximately 26% of boys and 17% of girls are either overweight or obese.
- Obesity among young people shows an increase from 4% in 2002 to 6% in 2006.
- Just under one-third of Canadian Grade 9 and 10 students indicate that they have smoked a cigarette.
- Over half of Grade 9 and 10 students report having tried alcohol by the time they were 15 years old.
- 22% of students in Grades 9 and 10 report having had sexual intercourse.
- Just under two-fifths of students report being victims of bullying.
- Reports of racial bullying show a slight increase from 2002 to 2006.
- 14% of boys who carry weapons report that they carry handguns or other fire-arms. More girls than boys who carry weapons report carrying tear gas or pepper spray.
- About 1 in 5 students typically miss one or more days of school or other usual activities in a 12-month period due to an injury.
- The percentage of injuries that happen during organized activities tends to increase with advancing grade.
- By Grade 10, girls clearly are experiencing poorer emotional health than boys.

Not surprisingly, these issues are connected in complicated ways to the social contexts in which youth live, including their family, educational, and socio-economic settings. For instance, recent research has called for a better understanding of the social and cultural correlates of suicide (Canada 2003), which is the second leading cause of death among 15–24 year olds in Canada, (with accidents and homicide being first and third respectively). Among Aboriginal youth, who face some of the most difficult social and economic problems, the suicide rate is five to six times higher compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Canada 2002).

Corporal punishment of children by parents in Canada is still prevalent, despite the fact that numerous studies have shown that spanking does not reduce deviant behaviour, and in fact increases psychological stress and the probability of anti-social behaviour (Straus et al. 1997; Taylor et al. 2010; Turner 2002). Moreover, a study of changes in anti-social behaviour before and after Sweden banned corporal punishment in 1979 suggests that youth have demonstrated “substantial improvement” in well-being in the years after the ban, and although causality was not inferred, it would seem that corporal punishment is not necessary to improve the well-being of young people in that country (Durrant 2000). In spite of these findings, and the fact that many countries in Europe have followed Sweden’s lead and have now banned corporal punishment, most Canadian parents see nothing wrong in disciplining their children by hitting them, and Canadian law on the matter tends to emphasize parental rights to hit rather than children’s rights not to be.

Thus, in the context of increasing acceptance within medicine and the helping professions that the determinants of health and well-being are social, it is crucial that social and economic supports be buttressed and made more robust. But this is

not happening. As Eisler and Schissel (Eisler and Schissel 2008, pp. 168–169) write, in the late 1970s Established Program Financing trimmed federal transfer payments while decreasing equalization payments to the provinces:

This trend continued with the election of a majority Liberal government whose 1995 budget sought to reduce the deficit by 13.6 billion dollars over two years through a combination of spending cuts and modest tax increases. Social security transfers to the provinces were targeted as the primary recipient of governmental cutbacks (Johnson 1997). The federal government reduced monetary transfers to the provinces by 2.5 billion dollars in 1996–97 and 4.5 billion in 1997–98. This followed an initial cut of 1.5 billion dollars in transfer payments in 1994 and a decrease of 5 billion dollars to the Canadian Assistance Plan and post-secondary education and health in 1994–95. As well, a new block fund, the Canadian Health and Social Transfer program, was created through the amalgamation of the Canadian Assistance Program and funding for health and post-secondary education.

Again, this trend towards devolution of federal and eventually provincial responsibility for financing social programs has its roots in a neo-liberal agenda underscored by the assumption that markets should dictate social well-being, and that the coupling of free-market ideology with the welfare of children and families is both inevitable and desirable. Further, the ideology of “trickle down” responsibilization locates the causes of social problems such as health inequity, economic inequality, and crime in the alleged deficits of individuals, their peers, families and communities, rather than focusing analysis on social and economic conditions (Bottrell 2009). The transition to well paying, meaningful employment which is predicated on education, healthy living and above all, the availability of jobs is more precarious now than it has ever been. And this precarious world, as Jock Young (2007b, p. 12) characterizes it fosters “a sense of insecurity of insubstantiality, and of uncertainty, a whiff of chaos and a fear of falling.” And it is in this context that we witness:

The obsession with rules, an insistence on clear uncompromising lines of demarcation between correct and incorrect behaviour, a narrowing of borders, the decreased tolerance of deviance, a disproportionate response to rule-breaking, an easy resort to punitiveness and a point at which simple punishment begins to verge on the vindictive.

Instead of after-school programs, then, we have surveillance. Rather than employment training, we have growing under-and unemployment and a rise in the proportion of children under 18 using food banks from 38% in 1989 to 42% by 2004 (Canadian Council on Social Development 2006). And as a cure for the putative problem of unruly youth we have high pitched sound emitters instead of clean, safe places where youth can hang out. As the late Ian Taylor (1999) reminds us, capitalist societies have never been very supportive of the young. Nor have they been particularly kind to them in the media, which continues to play on unsubstantiated public fears about disorderly youth thereby amplifying both the magnitude and character of youth crime.

Thus, it should be clear from the arguments and data in this chapter that children and youth do not exist in a vacuum. Our social environment conditions our behaviour by setting limits on our life chances. Put differently, not everyone is

born into the same social circumstances, and this inequality of condition sets the boundaries within which people make their lives. If we are to understand the status and behaviour, “good or bad”, of Canada’s youth, we must take account of their social circumstances. This chapter has provided a necessarily brief overview of some of the key social and economic factors facing Canadian youth with the aim of giving the reader a basic understanding of the role of market economies and the social upheaval they tend to generate. An understanding of context, is essential to understanding the nexus of crime and youth. In the following chapter, I present data on the nature and contours of youth crime in Canada.

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