



First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis - Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 – Defining and measuring First Nations child poverty

This chapter outlines methods of measuring poverty, describes the barriers to effectively measuring First Nations child poverty, and summarizes the research on culturally appropriate measures and the need to test for cultural relevancy across First Nations.

Poverty measures fail First Nations children

Prior to Canada's establishment of its first poverty reduction strategy in 2018, Canada did not define 'poor' and did not estimate the number of poor families and individuals in the country.¹ Instead, the government published statistics that compare household income levels using three measures: Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), Low Income Measure (LIM), and Market Basket Measure (MBM). The government claims that, used together, these methods provide a "complete picture of low income."²

Despite this claim, Canada's picture of low income has always been far from complete. Its standard measures fail to capture the extent and depth of First Nations child poverty. Neither the LICO nor the MBM are available for people resident on reserves. At the time the literature review was published (2015), the most recent data available to calculate First Nations child poverty was from the 2006 long-form census. Macdonald & Wilson (2013)³ used the Low Income Measure (LIM) from this census to calculate rates of First Nations child poverty, which were 50% nationwide, 62% in Manitoba, and 64% in Saskatchewan,

though the authors note that some reserves were not included in the census.⁴

The need for culturally appropriate measures

In addition to the shortage of relevant data for calculating poverty rates on reserves, standard measures of economic poverty fail to consider diverse cultural contexts, extended families, the community context, and how the availability of non-contaminated and sustainable traditional territories for hunting and other resource-producing activities play a large role in whether or not, and how, First Nations individuals and families experience poverty. Standard poverty measures also fail to account for the dramatic inequalities in public services and infrastructure found on many reserves.

In *Canada's First Reduction Poverty Strategy* (2018), the government lists its funding commitments to improve on-reserve housing, water infrastructure, child and family services, and health services, but notes that there is still no way to measure poverty rates on reserves. The government says it will identify and address these measurement gaps as it moves towards its target to reduce poverty in Canada by 50% by 2030.⁵

Establishing clear, effective, and culturally appropriate poverty measures that enable close monitoring of child poverty is essential for providing the robust data necessary for addressing the exceedingly high rates of First Nations child poverty.

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¹ Murphy, Zhang & Dionne, (2012)

² Statistics Canada. (2011). Low income lines, 2009-2010.

³ Macdonald & Wilson. (2013). *Poverty or prosperity: Indigenous children in Canada*.

⁴ In 2016, Macdonald and Wilson reported that on-reserve poverty rates in Manitoba have increased to 76%. *Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada*.

⁵ *Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html#h2.4>