



**HEALTHY HEALTH INDICATORS?  
ON THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF CHILDHOOD IN  
EUROPEAN HEALTH STATISTICS**

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**INTRODUCTION 1**

The health of childhood and adolescence is a large topic, but has led in traditional public health to the development of restricted indicators such as:

- infant mortality,
- morbidity (childhood cancer, diabetes, asthma and infectious diseases),
- dental health,
- vaccine coverage,
- admission in hospitals,
- and substance abuse.



**In this work we examine child health indicators in the European Union with the objective of reinforcing the visibility of this age group in health statistics and health policies.**

**European countries need a more child-focus health policy and health information system in order to build child health visibility and to stimulate national, regional and local actors.**

## **THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF CHILD HEALTH: A REVIEW**

In recent years significant efforts have been made to articulate by European Comisión (DG Sanco) and other international agencies such as OECD and WHO/Europe a set of stable indicators about the health of populations of their member states.

### **The more ambitious initiatives are:**

- The *OECD Health Indicators*
- The *European Commission's Health Monitoring Programme (HMP)* and its ECHI Project (*European Community Health Indicators* phases 1 and 2) .

## THE OECD HEALTH INDICATORS 1

### OECD HEALTH INDICATORS (2005) (Brief list)



Child health indicators in italics

#### Health Status

Life expectancy at birth

Life expectancy at age 65

Mortality, all causes and leading causes of death

Cardio-vascular diseases, mortality

Cancer, mortality

External causes of death

*Infant mortality \**

*Infant health: low birth weight \**

*Dental health among children\**

## THE OECD HEALTH INDICATORS 2

### Health Care Resources and Utilisation



Practising physicians

Practising nurses

Remuneration of health professionals (physicians and nurses)

Acute care hospital beds, availability and occupancy rates

Medical technologies

Consultations with doctors

*Childhood immunisation\**

Influenza immunisation among elderly people

Hospital discharges

Average length of stay in hospitals

Cardio-vascular procedures

Caesarean sections

Cataract surgeries, ambulatory and inpatient

*\*Child health indicators in italics*

## THE OECD HEALTH INDICATORS 3

### Health Expenditure and Financing

Health expenditure per capita

Health expenditure per capita, growth trends

Health expenditure in relation to gross domestic product (GDP)

Health expenditure by function

Pharmaceutical expenditure .

Sources of financing for health care



### Non-medical Determinants of Health

Tobacco consumption (15+)

Alcohol consumption (15+)

Food consumption

Overweight and obesity

*\*Child health indicators in italics*

## THE OECD HEALTH INDICATORS 4

### Demographic and Economic Context

Total population and population structure

Fertility rates (children per woman aged 15-49)

Gross domestic product (GDP) and income inequality



*\*Child health indicators in italics*

## **THE HEALTH MONITORING PROGRAMME (HMP), ECHI AND CHILD**

- The ECHI (*European Community Health Indicators*) project was carried out in the framework of the Health Monitoring Programme and the Community Public Health Programme 2003-2008. The result is an indicators set for the public health field arranged according to a conceptual view on health, health determinants and health interventions.
- The Child Health Indicators of Life and Development (CHILD) Project...Making visible the invisible.

## **THE CHILD SHORTLIST 1: DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF CHILD HEALTH**

- Children's Socio-economic Circumstances
  - Children in Poverty
  - Parental Educational Attainment
  - Children in Single Parent Households
  - Asylum Seeking Children

## **THE CHILD SHORTLIST 2: CHILD HEALTH STATUS AND WELL-BEING**

### **Child Mortality**

- Child Mortality Rates
- Selected Cause-specific Child Mortality Rates

### **Child Morbidity**

- Incidence of Childhood Cancer
- Incidence of Childhood Diabetes
- Prevalence of Childhood Asthma
- Incidence of Specific Childhood Infectious Diseases
- Child Dental Morbidity

### **Injuries to Children**

- Burns to Children Necessitating Hospital Admission
- Poisoning to Children Necessitating Hospital Admission
- Fracture of Long-bones in Children

### **Mental Health of Children**

- Attempted Suicide by Children

## **THE CHILD SHORTLIST 3: DETERMINANTS OF CHILD HEALTH, RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

### **- Parental Determinants**

- Breastfeeding
- Exposure of Children to Household Environmental Tobacco Smoke
- Parental Support of Children

### **Child Lifestyle Determinants**

- Physical Activity by Children
- Tobacco Smoking by Children
- Alcohol Abuse by Children
- Substance Misuse by Children

### **Other Factors**

- Childhood Obesity and Overweight
- Children in Care
- Early School Leavers
- Pre-primary Educational Enrolment
- Air Pollution Exposure of Children

## **THE CHILD SHORTLIST 4: CHILD HEALTH SYSTEMS AND POLICY**

### ***Health Systems Policy***

- Marginalised Children's Health Care
- Parental Accompaniment of Hospitalised Children

### ***Health System Quality***

- Immunisation Delivery Coverage
- Survival Rates of Acute Lymphatic Leukaemia in Children

### ***Social Policy Indicators***

- Physical Punishment of Children
- Anti-bullying Policies in Schools

### ***Physical Protection Policy***

- Policies to Promote Safe Mobility and Transport for Children
- Policies to Protect Children from Exposure to Lead
- Policies to Protect Children from Exposure to Potentially Hazardous Noise
- Policies to Reduce Exposure of Children to Environmental Tobacco Smoke.

## **THE CHILD PROJECT: GAPS AND SHORTCOMINGS 1**

- 1.- Demographic and socio-economic determinants of CHILD health indicators are comprehensive, but a more detailed definition of gender dimensions should be included.
- 2.- Child health status and well-being indicators combine traditional measures (childhood mortality, morbidity and injuries) with other parameters like suicide in children. Nevertheless, more detailed indicators of mental health must be implemented for a fuller analysis of health status in these age groups

## **THE CHILD PROJECT: GAPS AND SHORTCOMINGS 2**

3.- Determinants of child health, risk and protective factors indicators should include new social behaviors such as hours of TV and video-games per day and use of informational technologies. Furthermore, many studies have pointed out that social network, social support and social resources are good predictors of health status and risk.

## **CONCLUSIONS 1**

The health of childhood and adolescence is a vast topic with meagre visibility in health statistics and health information systems. A sensitive child health approach requires a specific indicators set as well as a comprehensive perspective involving different methodologies (quantitatives and qualitatives) and efforts moving beyond health mortality and morbidity indicators to include a fuller range of health determinants and wellbeing of children



## CONCLUSIONS 2

Children and adolescents are two age groups vulnerable to social determinants of health. Children and adolescents born and grow up in a social world which can have positive or negative influences on their health, and at the same time they are part of this social world. Following *The United Nations Declaration and Convention on the Rights of the Child* we can say that children are individuals in their own right. The lack of visibility of childhood and adolescence in health reports and policies can be understood as a shortcoming to reach this right.