

Why It's Tough To Be a Youth in Indiana

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Kids Count in Indiana 2017 report details highs and lows of life of children in Indiana, from health to education

It's not easy being a child. And it can be even harder to be a child in Indiana, according to data released Monday.

Indiana has the 15th largest population of youth younger than 18, with more than 1.5 million children living here. But many youth in Indiana experience poverty and maltreatment, says the 2017 Kids Count in Indiana Data Book from the [Indiana Youth Institute](#) with support from the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#).

The annual report paints a picture of the experience of children who live in Indiana, by sharing statistics on families and communities, education, the economy, health and safety.

Here are 10 things that this year's study, which pulls data from 2015 and 2016, tells us:

Many children live in poverty: In 2015, 1 in 5 children younger than 18, or 20.9 percent, lived in poverty, representing a slight improvement from 2014, when 21.5 percent fell into this category. Younger children are more likely to live in poverty; about 23 percent of those younger than 5 live in poverty.

Things may be improving, however, in Indiana, the state with the second-lowest cost of living. From 2014 to 2015, the median annual income for families with children here rose to \$60,856 from \$56,820. In the same time period, the number of families with children earning less than \$15,000 dipped to 77,000 families from nearly 85,000.

Teen suicide is more common here: Indiana ranked the third highest of 30 states cited by the Kids Count in Indiana Data Book when it came to the percentage of high school students (19.8 percent) who have contemplated suicide and second (17 percent) for those who have made a plan. The state ranked 10th

when it came to those who made a suicide attempt. In 2015, 55 minors in Indiana committed suicide, compared with 52 the year before.

Many teens are unhappy here: Indiana youth also report greater depression than their peers in many other states. About 30 percent of high school students here reported feelings of sadness or hopelessness lasting two weeks or more. More than 12 percent of youth from the ages 12 to 17 in Indiana reported having had a major depressive episode in the 2013-14 school year. Nationally, that number was 11 percent.

Infant mortality remains a problem for Indiana. Infant mortality continues to be a problem: Perennially worse than the national average in this category, Indiana still has an infant mortality rate of 7.3 per 1,000, which is higher than the national average of 5.9 per 1,000. In 2015, the report says, 611 children died in Indiana before their first birthday.

Child abuse here is rising: Since 2011, the rate of child abuse and neglect has been rising steadily in Indiana, linked to parents' use of illicit substances. In 2015, 17 of every 1,000 children in the state fell victim to abuse or neglect. Parental drug use played a role in more than half, or 52 percent, of the cases in which the Department of Child Services removed a child from a home in 2016. In 2013, drugs played a role in only 32 percent of such cases.

Indiana children have increasing access to weapons: Of the nearly 6,000 firearms recovered in 2015, 228 of the weapons belonged to a person younger than 18. The previous year, 160 firearms were traced back to people in that age group. In 2011, 17 percent of Indiana high school students said they had carried a gun, knife or club in the past month. This report found that number had climbed to 19.6 percent.

Violence taints many teens' relationships: Indiana has consistently higher rates of dating violence among teens than the nation as a whole. One national survey found that Indiana had the third-highest rate of 30 states for sexual dating violence among teens, at 12.6 percent. About 10 percent of Indiana teens said they have been forced to have sex against their will and another 10 percent reported being physically hurt by a

person they dated.

Indiana's youth are growing more diverse: Since 2000, when about 17 percent of Indiana children were not white, the youth population has grown more diverse. In 2015 just under a quarter of Indiana youth were a race or ethnicity other than white, non-Hispanic. While only 1.5 percent of Indiana youth are foreign born, nearly 1 in 10 speak a foreign language at home. The majority, or more than 60 percent, speak Spanish. The others speak Indo-European languages or Asian or Pacific Island languages.

The teen birth rate is at its lowest ever: Young women ages 15 to 17 had a birth rate of 11.1 per 1,000 in 2015, down from 13.6 per 1,000 just two years earlier. In 2014, 8.1 percent of newborns in this state had a parent younger than 20, down from 8.8 percent the previous year.

Our higher education profile has improved: More full-time college students finished their studies on time in 2015 than in past years. Almost 40 percent of students who entered college in 2011 completed their degrees in four years. About 5 percent of students entering a full-time two-year program in 2011 finished on time, compared with more than 8 percent of those who started in 2013.

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