

UNITED STATES

Country Highlights



OECD (2009), *Doing Better for Children*

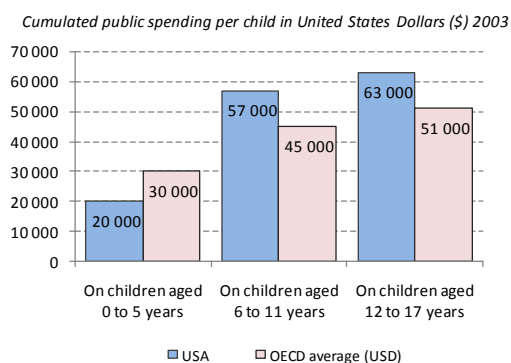
The United States should spend more on young children and disadvantaged teenagers to improve poor child health, poor basic education and high rates of child poverty, according to the OECD's first report on child well-being. "Despite the United States' strong research and policy tradition in the area of child well-being, too many American children are still left behind", according to co-author of the OECD report, Mr Simon Chapple.

Both US public spending on children and average family incomes rank among the highest in OECD countries. Indeed, US average family income is bettered only by Luxembourg. Total public spending on child welfare and education is USD 140 000 up to the age of 18, compared to the OECD average of just over USD 125 000.

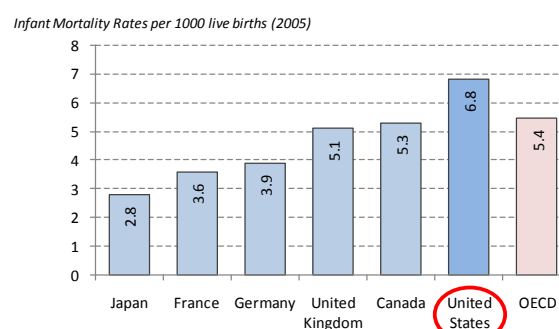
In spite of the United States being a very high income country, in key outcomes of health, education and poverty, US children do less well than their peers in other, less rich countries.

Infant mortality (4th worst in the OECD after Mexico, Turkey and the Slovak Republic) and child mortality (5th worst in the OECD) are higher than the OECD average. So too are rates of low birth weight (6th worst in the OECD). The rate of teen births is over three times the OECD average. Amongst the OECD, the rate of births per girls aged 15-19 in the United States is lower only than Mexico.

Spending on older children in the United States is three times that of spending on the youngest children, 2003



Infant mortality rates in the United States are above the OECD average



Furthermore, the average educational achievement of 15 year-old children in the United States compares poorly to other OECD countries (7th worst in the OECD). A poor average school performance is compounded by large gaps between good and poor school performers (6th worst in the OECD).

Child poverty rates in the United States at 21.6% are nearly double the OECD average of 12.4%. Additionally, despite their high family incomes, the rate of children in the United States who lack more than four of eight key educational possessions – a desk to study, a quiet place to work, a computer for schoolwork, educational software, an internet connection, a calculator, a dictionary, and school textbooks – is poor, the 5th worst in the OECD after Japan, Greece, Turkey and Mexico.

Good beginnings are crucial. But in spite of having above average overall child spending, the United States spends one third less than the OECD average on young children (see the first graph above). Based on international and US evidence, the OECD concludes that the United States should spend more for better starts in life for younger, disadvantaged children. Equally, the United States government should ensure that current high rates of spending on older children become more effective in meeting the needs of disadvantaged teens.