

Childhood, Wellness, and Nonlocal Consciousness

| Stephan A. Schwartz |

The Schwartzreport tracks emerging trends that will affect the world, particularly the United States. For EXPLORE it focuses on matters of health in the broadest sense of that term, including medical issues, changes in the biosphere, technology, and policy considerations, all of which will shape our culture and our lives.

As President Obama said at the Newtown, Connecticut memorial service for the children murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School, “Caring for our Children. If we don’t get that right, we don’t get anything right.”

So do we take good care of our children? If you use actual facts, instead of fantasy, ideology or theology, it is pretty clear that while individual parents struggle against all odds working multiple jobs to protect and nurture their children, as a society the answer must be: No. It is a horrible truth, and I expect most people would be resistant to that conclusion, using their own intentions for their own children as their measure. But when we stand before ourselves, naked for just a moment of our illusions, facts tell us something very different.

Start at the beginning, with infant mortality. How likely is it that an American baby will survive birth? We are the richest country in the world, and we spend more, so very much more, on healthcare than any other country on Earth. Yet the data says there is no correlation between money expended and outcome. Two years ago I looked into this, and found that “The Centers for Disease Control reported that Infant mortality declined for four of the five years as a leading cause of death during the 2005–2011 period. But one has to put that decline in context. In 2008, the U.S. ranked 27th among Organization

for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. In 2011, even though infant mortality had gone down in the U.S., other countries had improved more, and we still ranked 27th.”¹

And I think it is important to note that the rate of baby death is not spread uniformly across the country. That matters and can teach something important. In 1932 in *New State Ice Co. v Liebmann*, Associate Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis made what I think is the relevant point when he wrote, “(a) state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”² Look at the map (Figure 1), and you can see how uneven the spread is on the various state experiments with infant mortality. It shows us that different social policies produce very different social outcomes. The data shows that states which design their policies on the basis of ideology and/or theology are far less successful in creating safe happy childhoods.

INFANT MORTALITY RATE BY STATE

Once born, we know what good diet means in a child’s life. I am sure that for most of the people reading this, diet is something to which they give considerable thought both for themselves, and for the children or elders in their care. We love our children. But we do not seem to love other people’s children. How else to explain the millions of children living in poverty and unsure where their next meal is coming from, or where they will sleep tonight.

When we think about hunger I suspect most of us think of Africa and the TV ads showing large eyed starving

children that run with requests for money. And Americans are very generous. As private citizens we give millions to feed them, and the government gives tens of millions more. Is it ironic or just appalling then to realize that in the United States 5.3 million children lived in food-insecure households in 2014.³ In the nation’s capitol, one of the richest cities in the country, with notably fine roads and infrastructure maintenance, nearly one out of three children (31%) have food issues. In fact, the District of Columbia ranks as one of the most food-insecure areas in the country for children.⁴ It is almost Dickensian.

And once again the state-to-state data shows the same trend. Those states that talk the most about “family values” and proclaim their social policies are based on those values perform notably worse than states that are less doctrinaire, more inclusive, and more focused on wellness as opposed to ideology or theology. According to Feeding America: “In 2013, the top five states with the highest rate of food-insecure children under 18 were D.C., Mississippi, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Georgia.”⁵ In that same year “the top five states with the lowest rate of food-insecure children under 18 were North Dakota, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Virginia.”⁵ And food is just the beginning.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation collects data and publishes an annual *Kids Count Data Book*.⁶ In 2013, according to their research 22 per cent of minor children—that is over 16 million children—lived in poverty. The rate of child poverty is still several percentage points higher than before the recession, and greater than it was during the Great Depression.⁷ A child in 2015 is more likely to be in poverty than one in 2007.

INFANT MORTALITY RATE BY STATE

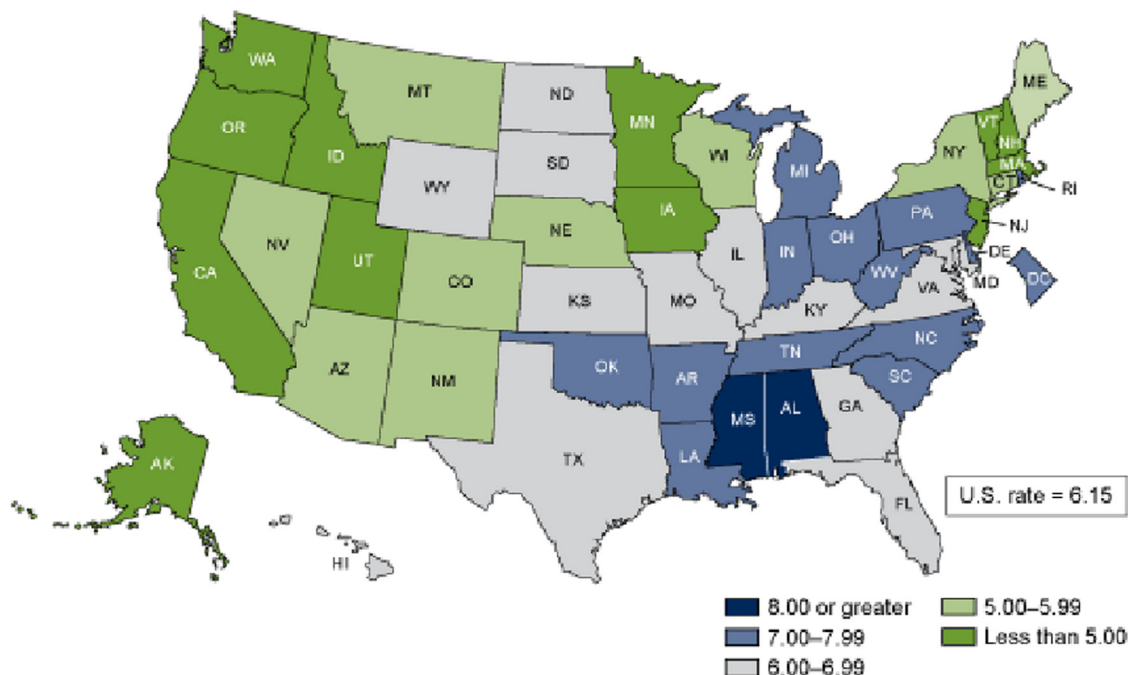


Figure 1.

Much of this, of course, results from the economic collapse. Nearly one-third of children (31% or 22,837,000 children) “were living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment.”⁷ And if one is not employed in the United States, the social safety net for children is uniquely flimsy compared with other developed nations.

The most recent U.S. Department of Education’s count of homeless children in U.S. public schools and the 2013 U.S. Census data both revealed that the United States had an historic high in the number of homeless minor children, almost 2.5 million of them (2,483,539) roaming the streets and living in shelters. That works out to be one in every 30 children in the country.⁸

And again the data reveals a state-to-state disparity. The one state that does not fit the pattern in this instance is California. The reason for this, the data suggests, is the enormous number of low income immigrants both from other countries and other states (Figure 2).

HOMELESSNESS BY STATE

Given the large number of homeless minor children is it a surprise that in

the U.S. there is also more child abuse than any other industrialized nation? An American child is 11 times more likely to be abused than a boy or girl in Italy. Three times more likely to be punched and beaten than a child in Canada.⁹ According to the National Child Abuse Hotline, “Every year more than 3 million reports of child abuse are made in the United States involving more than 6 million children.”¹⁰ The best data available suggest that between 2002 and 2012 more than 20,000 American children were *murdered in their own homes by a family member—predominately by guns*. And again, there is a distinct difference between states.

I could go on citing one social metric after another, but they all tell the same basic story, so I want to use one final example to make what I think is the critical distinction. In the Red value states, which ostentatiously place much emphasis on pre-marital abstinence and marital integrity, the results in fact are just the opposite. There is both a higher incidence of teenage sexual activity in those states, and because children are not prepared with fact-based sexual education, a concomitant higher incidence

of teenage sexually transmitted diseases, more teen pregnancy, and when they do marry, more subsequent divorce. Why is this happening? Because the social policies are grounded in hypocrisy not based on facts.

When we look at the lives of children across the United States and in other nations through the prism of actual data, it becomes obvious that we know how to create childhood wellness. There is no mystery to this. There is ample evidence both here and abroad, as to what works. What is missing is not the path, but the political and social will to walk it.

For me one of the most depressing metrics of all is revealed in the Harvard Institute of Politics’ *28th Survey of Young Americans; Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service*.¹¹ They polled 2011 18–29-year olds, and asked, “For you personally, is the idea of the American Dream alive or dead?” 51% responded “dead.”¹¹ Only 68% of these 18–29-year olds bothered to register to vote. Only 37% of Democratic youth, and 25% of Republican plan to vote.¹¹ Our social policies are costing us the optimism of our youth, at a time when believing things can be better has never been more important.

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