



May 1998

*Escape from Poverty: What Makes a Difference for Children?* P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (Eds.).

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Recommended Citation

(1998) "*Escape from Poverty: What Makes a Difference for Children?*" P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (Eds.)," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 2 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol25/iss2/18>

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cases were previously dealt with by statutory agencies, growing public concern that children are being physically harmed on a significant scale has resulted in many more investigations and interventions that often result in the removal of children from their homes. This development has been fueled by often sensationalized media reports which have purportedly uncovered a hidden incidence of child abuse of epidemic proportions. As case after case has been brought to the attention of the public, more and more abused children have been identified and pressures on the authorities to be ever more vigilant have increased. While these developments have been most marked in the United States, there have been similar trends in other European countries. The recent sexually motivated murders of young teen-age girls in Belgium created a national scandal while in Britain, child sexual and physical abuse cases are perennial topics in popular national newspapers.

Neil Gilbert's edited collection of articles about child abuse policies and programs in Canada, the United States and eight European nations seeks to identify the different ways in which these industrial countries deal with the problem. It shows that there are significant differences in the incidence of child abuse between these countries and very different approaches to dealing with the problem. These differences reflect complex factors such as the definition of abuse, variations in statistical reporting and different cultural approaches which defining child maltreatment in different ways. The book's major conclusion is that the problem of child abuse is not simply a matter of responding to objective cases of maltreatment but a complex one which reflects broader societal conditions. It shows that the relative nature of the way child abuse is defined and dealt with is not widely appreciated by social scientists or policy makers. Although the book does not propose how these differences can be accommodated within a comprehensive approach for preventing and treating child abuse, it contains a wealth of interesting information about public child welfare programs in the industrial nations. As such it makes a useful contribution to the development of comparative social policy research.

P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (Eds.),  
*Escape from Poverty: What Makes a Difference for Children?*

Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997. \$ 49.95 hardcover, \$ 24.95 papercover.

There is widespread pessimism among child welfare advocates, social scientists and social workers that the recent so-called 'welfare reform' developments will have a negative impact on the well-being of children. The legislation enacted in 1996 strictly limits the time that needy families can be provided with income support, and while it requires that efforts be made to place clients in employment, many experts believe that those in receipt of income support will simply be left to fend for themselves without the investments and services that will, in fact, ensure that they become self-sufficient. Since the great majority of families receiving income support are headed by single women with children, it is anticipated that the incidence of child poverty will increase sharply and that many more children will ultimately be removed from their families and be brought into the child welfare system. The incidence of child poverty in the United States is already shockingly high by international standards. The prospect of a further increase is indeed distressing.

It remains to be seen whether these ominous predictions will, in fact, materialize. While numerous long range studies are currently being implemented to track the fortunes of families on income support, it is vital that social workers and social service administrators use the available scientific knowledge to prevent more children from falling into poverty. It is in this regard that this book will be particularly useful. Summarizing the research evidence about those interventions that effectively reduce child poverty, it will be a useful resource for dealing with the problem.

The book consists of 14 chapters that deal with a variety of policies and programs that facilitate the escape of poor families from poverty. The chapters are written by some of the nation's leading experts in the field. They deal with issues as diverse as maternal employment, child care, the role of fathers in reducing poverty and the provision of health care. The final section considers future policy and research directions for poverty reduction efforts. Although the quality of the book's chapters is somewhat variable, there is much in the collection that will be of interest and value to those who are concerned with the pressing problem of child poverty today.