

KIDS COUNT: Using Demographic Indicators to Increase Public Awareness of Child Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Every year since 1990, the KIDS COUNT project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation has produced a national Data Book which provides statistical information related to the well-being of children nationally and state-by-state. Numerous other products, such as a Wall Chart, a Pocket Guide, and Data Wheel and a series of special reports have been produced and disseminated. The KIDS COUNT project also includes a network of organizations in every state that replicate this social indicator approach to increasing public awareness about children. Through these sustained efforts, KIDS COUNT has become one of the most widely known and widely respected Foundation-sponsored initiatives in the United States. Since most of the data in the KIDS COUNT Data Book and related products are demographic in nature it can be seen as an exercise in applied demography.

The major goal of KIDS COUNT report is to increase public awareness of children's issues in the media and public officials. To measure the success in achieving this goal, information on media coverage has been gathered every year for the past several years. Recently, we have gathered data on knowledge and awareness of KIDS COUNT among various groups of policy-makers and society leaders.

The paper will discuss the founding and development of the KIDS COUNT initiative including key ideas that shape the work of KIDS COUNT. The report will also cover the major activities of the project including some of the logistics involved in producing and disseminating 65,000 copies of the National Data Book each year.

Information from the release of the 2005 KIDS COUNT Data Book shows that it stimulated 885 newspaper articles which reached 56.9 million potential readers. It also resulted in 559 television spots reaching 19.8 million viewers, and 125 radio (including Voice of America) reaching 138 million listeners. A survey of state legislators shows that 75 percent are familiar with KIDS COUNT, and 55 percent say they have used KIDS COUNT products. The majority of state legislators say KIDS COUNT data are timely, credible and useful for policy-makers. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of state legislators say KIDS COUNT has had an impact on public awareness (regarding children's issues) in their state, and 60 percent say KIDS COUNT has had an impact on public policy in their state. Similar results are presented for county-level official, business leaders, and data users.