

# Greater wealth equals better health for most Canadian moms and their newborns

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Across all income levels, Canadian moms in better socioeconomic standing have better health outcomes than moms in lower socioeconomic brackets. The same relationship between socioeconomic position and health outcomes holds true for these moms' newborn babies, according to a new study.

A team of researchers placed 68,705 Canadian new [moms](#) and their babies along a socioeconomic spectrum by using factors about the moms such as education, whether she was living in poverty and the income of the neighbourhood she lives in. The researchers compared that data against 25 health indicators such as depression and pre-term births.

"Regardless of where they fell on the continuum, in 23 of the 25 health issues we looked at, lower socioeconomic position was tied to poorer health outcomes for the moms and their babies," said Dr. Patricia O'Campo, director of the Centre for Research on Inner City Health of St. Michael's Hospital. "Mothers with the lowest [socioeconomic position](#) generally reported the worst health outcomes in Canada. Those in the second-lowest gradient had the second-worst health outcomes, and so on..."

The data used in the study was self-reported as part of the Statistics Canada's 2006 Canadian Maternity Experiences Survey. The 25 health outcomes researchers used to analyze information about new mothers and their babies were categorized into five groups:

- maternal and infant health status indicators
- prenatal care
- maternal experience of labour and delivery
- neonatal medical care
- maternal perceptions of health-care services

The two health outcomes of the 25 where researchers found no difference in access to health care were whether the newborn required readmission to a hospital in the first 28 days and whether the baby was admitted into the neonatal intensive care unit immediately after birth.

"It's good that there is no difference in access for these two outcomes because they reflect cases of urgent need for care, but there are still 23 areas where this inequality exists for moms and newborns," said Dr. O'Campo, a social epidemiologist.

Although they had poorer [health outcomes](#) in most categories, moms on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum reported satisfaction with the level of health information they received during pregnancy. Many moms higher on the socioeconomic gradient, however, reported missing out on information that could have helped them during their pregnancy—including warning signs of early pregnancy, expected physical or emotional changes and recommended tests and procedures.

Because data was self-reported, some clinicians may have provided these details to patients, but Dr. O'Campo said the research results indicate that there is room for improvement and such information can be delivered more clearly and in a more balanced way for women on either end of the socioeconomic spectrum.

"Health-care providers have the power and knowledge to ensure everyone -including moms who face significant social, economic and health challenges- receives access to the right information at the right

time," said Dr. O'Campo. "The earlier a mom knows how to best care for herself and her baby, the better their health today and well into the future."

Dr. O'Campo said more research is needed looking broadly at social and economic disparities and what impact these gaps have on Canadians' health.

The study was published today in the journal *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*.

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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