



## Welfare babies: poor children's experiences informing healthy peer relationships in Canada.

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Abstract: Positive peer relationships among children living in poverty are important for their well-being, resiliency and mental and physical health. This paper explicates the 'felt experience' of children living in poverty, and the implications of these experiences for healthy peer relationships, from a re-analysis of two qualitative research studies in Canada examining children living in food insecure circumstances. Poor children feel deprived, part of the 'poor group', embarrassed, hurt, picked on, inadequate and responsible. Poor children internalize their own lack of social resources in feelings of deprivation. They experience negative feelings relative to their peers-inadequacy, embarrassment and hurt. Children do identify group membership but it is not used as a social resource, as it could be, but rather as a symbol of social segregation. Children also feel responsible for ameliorating some of the effects of their poverty and this seems to strengthen their relationship with their mothers. This could equally be translated into peer-related support, such as standing up to poor bashing, or engaging constructively with higher social class peers. Health promotion strategies that seek to foster positive peer relationships and enhance children's sense of belonging should offer novel social environments in which poor children can engage a variety of peers.

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