

CUISR:

Community – University Institute for Social Research

*Closer to Home:
Child and Family Poverty in Saskatoon*

by Maureen Jackson



Building Healthy Sustainable Communities

Community-University Institute for Social Research

CUI SR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUI SR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluatea applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUI SR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUI SR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

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ABSTRACT

Child poverty is a significant problem in Saskatoon. Several Saskatoon community organizations work on the front lines of child poverty, aiming to reduce its incidence. However, they feel that they are less able to affect policy change without all the empirical evidence available. To this end, Saskatoon Communities for Children Working Group on Child Poverty, the Political Action Group on Poverty, and the Community-University Institute for Social Research became partners in this local research project aimed at analyzing the extent of child and family poverty in Saskatoon. Neighbourhood analysis was performed to collect evidence on the extent and nature of children living in low-income families, including descriptive information on the prevalence and distribution of child poverty in Saskatoon.

Analysis of the data revealed that families living in poverty in Saskatoon are predominantly of Aboriginal ancestry, live on the city's West side, tend to live in rented housing, and have low employment rates. Additionally, a brochure-style report card on child poverty emerged from statistics gained in this report.

INTRODUCTION

Child and family poverty is a significant issue in almost every Canadian community, Saskatoon being no exception. The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), a non-profit organization that tracks and researches social issues in Canada, releases statistics on poverty, including child and family poverty, each year. In a recent report, CCSD stated that, "Poverty strikes hardest at children, the most vulnerable members of society and the least able to defend themselves ...the child poverty rate has increased [from 1989-1999]" (CCSD: The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty, 2000: xxi). While this may not be surprising to some, it is nevertheless cause for concern, and a worthy area for community organizations to provide aid and advocate for change. It is also worthy of note that the House of Commons set a ten-year goal to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000.

To this end, Saskatoon Communities for Children (SCC) and the Political Action Group on Poverty (PAGOP), in collaboration with Community Health and Epidemiology, College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan, received an internship funded by the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR). This

project's purpose is to move beyond CCSD's regional statistics and generate meaningful child and family poverty analysis at the neighbourhood level. This information is available for use by the project's community partners, as well as CUISR, to maintain an information base of completed internship projects to mutually benefit both the community and university.

DEFINING POVERTY

The definition of poverty used in this project is the Low Income Cut Off measure (LICO). This measure has been used by Statistics Canada since the 1960s, and continues to be a useful gauge. Although not without its controversies, the LICO method is useful as it implicitly incorporates both absolute and relative views of poverty. The LICO line is calculated in relation to an average family's expenditure on essentials—food, clothing, and shelter. A family falls beneath the LICO line if it spends more than twenty percent of its total income on these essentials than the average family. Families fall below the LICO line when they spend a high proportion of their income on essentials—this is LICO's absolute dimension. LICO lines also rise and fall in line with changes in average income—this is LICO's relative dimension.

No single measure of poverty is ideal; all involve some arbitrary choices. Whether or not to use pre- or post-tax income levels to measure poverty is hotly debated amongst poverty statistics analysts. Statistics Canada reports both pre- and post-tax measurements. Further, there has been a call from some government officials and social policy groups for using “basket” measures of poverty. Such measures argue for a poverty line set at an amount equal to purchasing a full basket of consumer items. A major problem with the market basket ideal is in determining what should be included, highlighting the subjectivity of this method (see <http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/inckids/2.htm>).

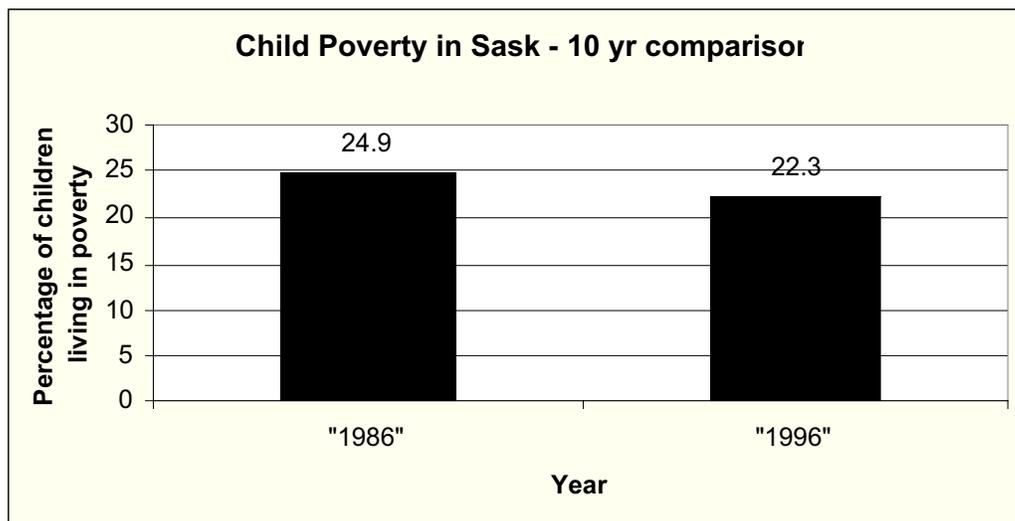
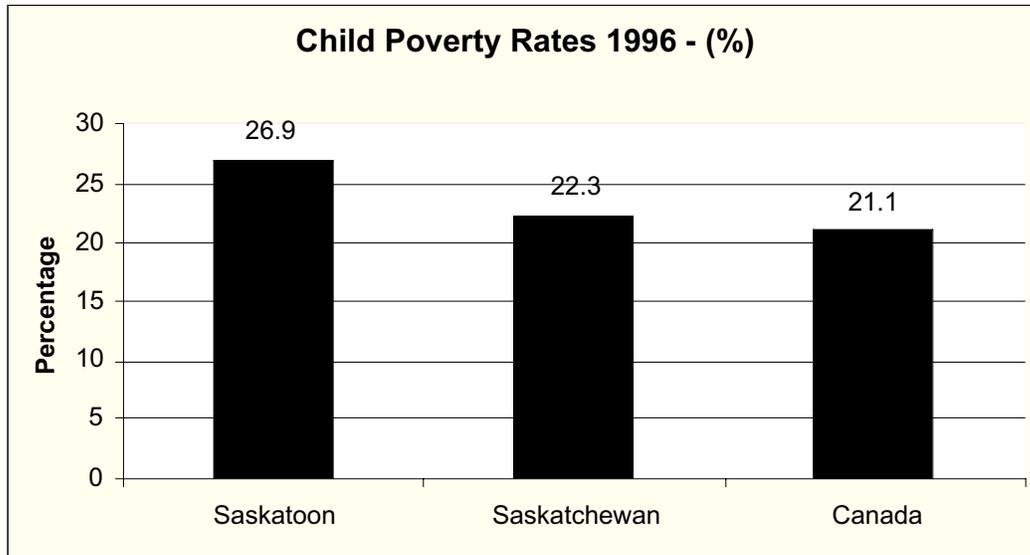
It is important not only to recognize differences in available methodologies, but also differences in interpretation. While working on this project, it became apparent that even within Saskatoon Communities for Children differing opinions and differing agendas existed. To this end, the present project attempts to perform neighbourhood analyses without feeding into those differing agendas. Although a difficult journey, it produced a more rigorous report. With this in mind, the LICO line is still the strongest method to determine the child and family poverty rate in Saskatoon.

RATES OF CHILD POVERTY

According to CCSD, 13,200 out of 49,100 children in Saskatoon live in poverty—a rate of 26.9%. It is appalling to imagine that more than one-quarter of all children living in

Saskatoon live in impoverished conditions. These children suffer from malnutrition, poorer academic outcomes, restricted access to preventative medicine (e.g. dental services) and many adverse psychosocial factors associated with poverty. These include social stigmatization, transportation, and a lack of “extras” such as newer clothing. The graphs in **Figure 1** illustrate the problem of child poverty in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Canada.

Figure 1. Child Poverty Rates.



Source: CCSD custom tabulations, Statistics Canada

In the present study, neighbourhood analyses were performed. This type of analysis was decided upon after much discussion surrounding issues of how best to catch the attention of the research's intended audience. Neighbourhood analysis is useful in that it can immediately grab the reader's attention as it immediately creates a point of personal relation for the audience. It is also a very dramatic and effective visual tool, making dry statistics suddenly clear and interesting.

Analysis was performed with assistance from Bill Holden from the City of Saskatoon. Using a software package called MapInfo v.4.0, Holden was able to insert the percentage of families living at or below the LICO line overlaid with characteristics determined prior to analysis onto coloured maps of the City of Saskatoon.

THE FACE OF CHILD POVERTY

Saskatoon children and families living in poverty are predominately of Aboriginal descent, live on the city's West side, have lower rates of employment, and tend to rent rather than own housing. There is also an increased number of single parent families living in poverty compared to two parent families.

It is important to keep in mind when discussing poverty in Saskatoon that this picture has been painted through the use of quantitative statistics. This project's aim was to provide a first line look at child and family poverty in Saskatoon. To this end, SCC decided that a quantitative component would be the best first choice. However, it is important to note that a quantitative look at the face of poverty only paints a limited picture. A second project, *Child Poverty in Canada, Saskatchewan, and Saskatoon: A Literature Review and the Voices of the People* (CUISR, 2003), is qualitative in nature, interviewing the children and families who live in poverty to attempt to provide a real "face" behind the numbers. It is hoped that a combination of the present quantitative project, along with a qualitative story-telling methodology will provide a much better understanding of the issue, and facilitate action.

Appendix A provides a tabulated summary of the neighbourhood analysis. However, the maps (**Appendix B**) are this project's core, and this table is not intended to replace them. The table merely serves to summarize some of the maps' important highlights. Additionally, not all information gained from the maps is included in this table.

There clearly exists an East-West division in Saskatoon regarding child and family poverty, in addition to important indicators such as ethnicity, employment, home ownership, and income adequacy. While this finding may not surprise some, hopefully it raises awareness of the problem to a larger audience. Awareness is the key to advocacy.

Obviously, the most startling picture of child and family poverty is found in an examination of the numbers behind the “income adequacy” variable. This is often referred to as “the depth of poverty.” It is a measurement of the median household income per person. For example, a family income of \$40,000 per year while supporting ten children is much more limiting than a \$40,000 per year family supporting one child. Notably, Briarwood fit the highest category of household income per person (\$25,800-32,700). This is an affluent neighbourhood on the city’s East side and has a zero percent Aboriginal population.

Even more interesting is the distinct division existing between the East and West sides of the South Saskatchewan River, as demonstrated by **Map 6**. This map provides the most startling picture of child and family poverty in Saskatoon.

It is important to note, however, that poverty exists not only on the West side nor affluence solely on the East side. Quite the contrary, both exist on each side of the river. However, the LICO divisions match the poverty most experienced by the West side. Additionally, while technically located on the city’s West side, the North sector (Silverwood Heights, Lawson Heights, and River Heights) is a much more affluent and shares more with the East side than the West.

INVITATION TO A DIALOGUE

The final piece of this project to date has been the development of a Report Card on Child Poverty for Saskatoon. This report card will be distributed through Saskatoon Communities for Children and be available for the general public in order to bring the issue of child poverty to a wider audience. Utilizing both the research from the current quantitative project, as well as the interviews and findings from the qualitative project, this report card will hopefully serve to facilitate action in Saskatoon regarding child and family poverty.

Ultimately, this research must benefit the community. The existence of CUISR and the relationship between university and community is exemplified by research in action. To this end, a collective development of policy surrounding child and family poverty in Saskatoon involving key stakeholders (both academic and community) benefits the issue. It is hoped that the present study has created a significant first step toward this goal. We are all responsible and accountable for children and families living in poverty amongst us.

**Appendix A. Selected Characteristics of the population (in percentage) by
Neighbourhood of Residence.**

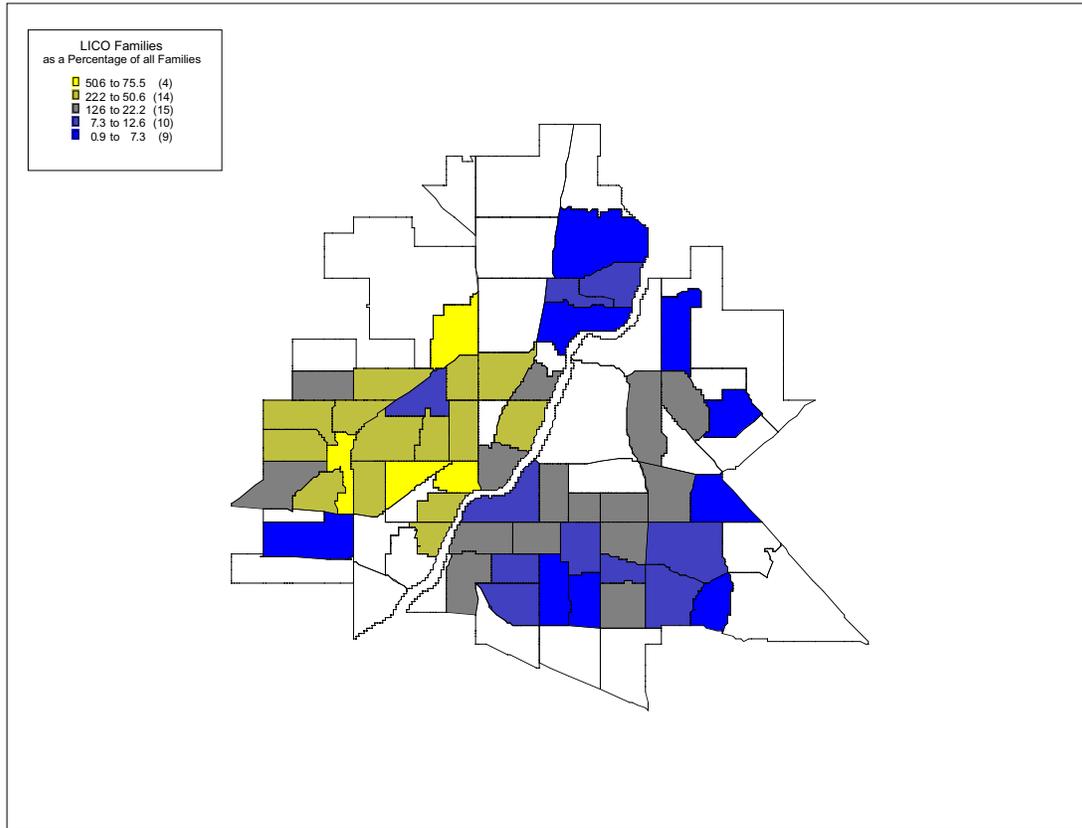
Neighborhood	%age of fams living in poverty	Labour Force employed (%)	Income Adequacy (\$)	Ancestry (%)
Adelaide/Churchill	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Airport Industrial	38.9-71.7	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Arbor Creek	NA	80.5-97.2	12,000-18,900	0.0-0.7
Avalon	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Brevoort Park	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Briarwood	NA	80.5-97.2	25,800-32,700	0.0-0.7
Buena Vista	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Caswell Hill	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Central Business District	0.9-6.2	11.5-56.1	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
City Park	11.5-20.6	56.1-67.6	12,000-18,900	6.6-35.8
College Park	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	6.6-35.8
College Park East	0.9-6.2	80.5-97.2	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Confederation Park	20.6-38.9	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	6.6-35.8
Confederati on S.C	38.9-71.7	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	35.8-47.0
Dundonald	11.5-20.6	80.5-97.2	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Eastview	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Erindale	0.9-6.2	80.5-97.2	12,000-18,900	0.0-0.7
Exhibition	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	6.6-35.8

Neighborhood	%age of fams living in poverty	Labour Force employed (%)	Income Adequacy (\$)	Ancestry (%)
Fairhaven	20.6-38.9	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	6.6-35.8
Forest Grove	11.5-20.6	80.5-97.2	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Greystone Heights	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Grosvenor Park	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	18,900-25,800	0.0-0.7
Haultain	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Holiday Park	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Holliston	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Hudson Bay Park	6.2-11.5	56.1-67.6	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Kelsey/Woodlawn	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
King George	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Lakeridge	0.9-6.2	80.5-97.2	12,000-18,900	0.0-0.7
Lakeview	6.2-11.5	80.5-97.2	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Lawson Heights	0.9-6.2	80.5-97.2	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Lawson Heights S.C	6.2-11.5	11.5-56.1	18,900-25,800	0.0-0.7
Massey Place	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Mayfair	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Meadowgreen	20.6-38.9	56.1-67.6-	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Montgomery Place	0.9-6.2	6.6-80.5	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Mount Royal	11.5-20.6	11.5-56.1	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8

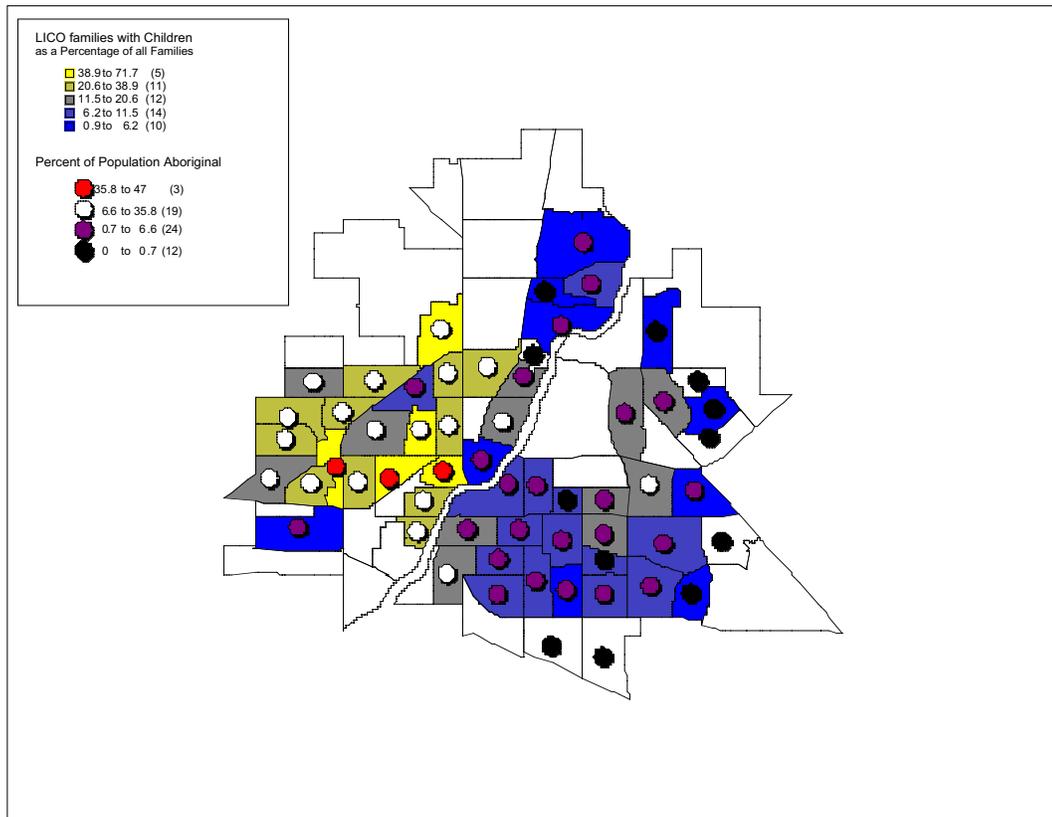
Neighborhood	%age of fams living in poverty	Labour Force employed (%)	Income Adequacy (\$)	Ancestry (%)
Nutana	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.6-6.6
North Park	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Nutana Park	0.9-6.2	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Nutana S. C	6.2-11.5	11.5-56.1	12,000-18,900	0.0-0.7
Pacific Heights	20.6-38.9	67.6-80.5	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Parkridge	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Pleasant Hill	38.9-71.7	11.5-56.1	5,100-12,000	35.8-47.0
Queen Elizabeth	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Richmond Heights	NA	56.1-67.6	12,000-18,900	0.0-0.7
River Heights	6.2-11.5	80.5-97.2	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Riversdale	38.9-71.7	11.5-56.1	5,100-12,000	35.8-47.0
Silverspring	0.9-6.2	80.5-97.2	18,900-25,800	0-0.7
Silverwood Heights	6.2-11.5	80.5-97.2	18,900-25,800	0.7-6.6
Sutherland	11.5-20.6	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Varsity View	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6
Westmount	38.9-71.7	56.1-67.6	5,100-12,000	6.6-35.8
Westview	20.6-38.9	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	6.6-35.8
Wildwood	6.2-11.5	67.6-80.5	12,000-18,900	0.7-6.6

Appendix B. Statistical Maps of Saskatoon

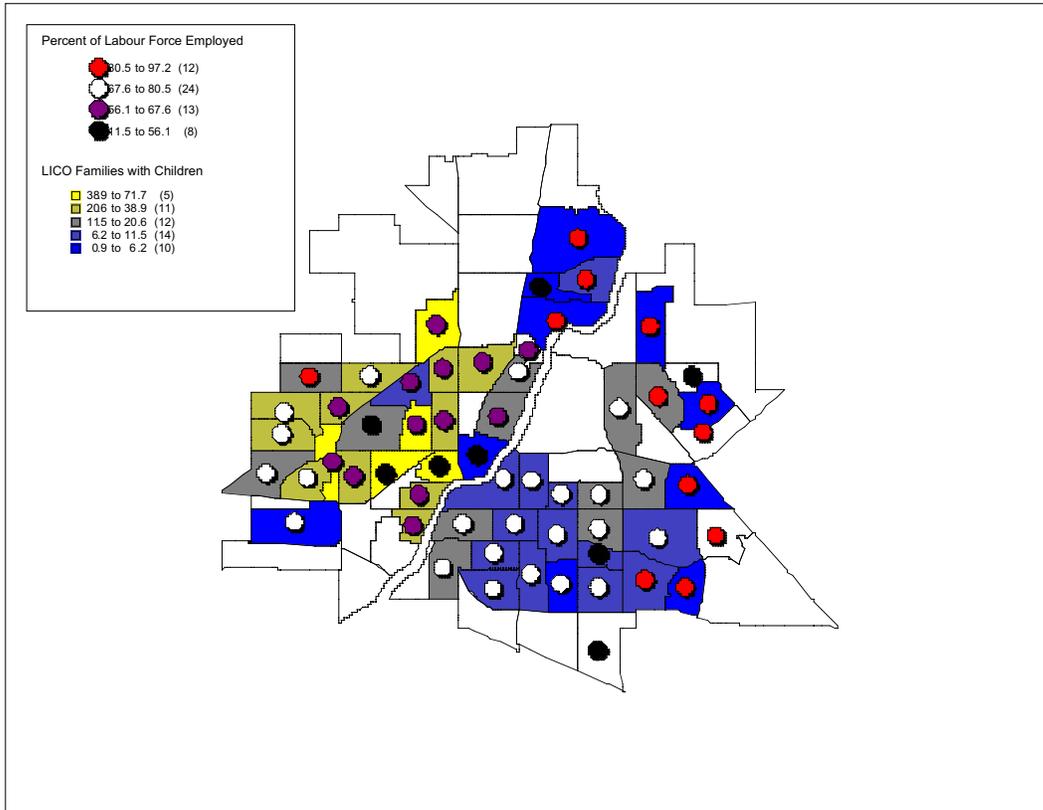
Map 1



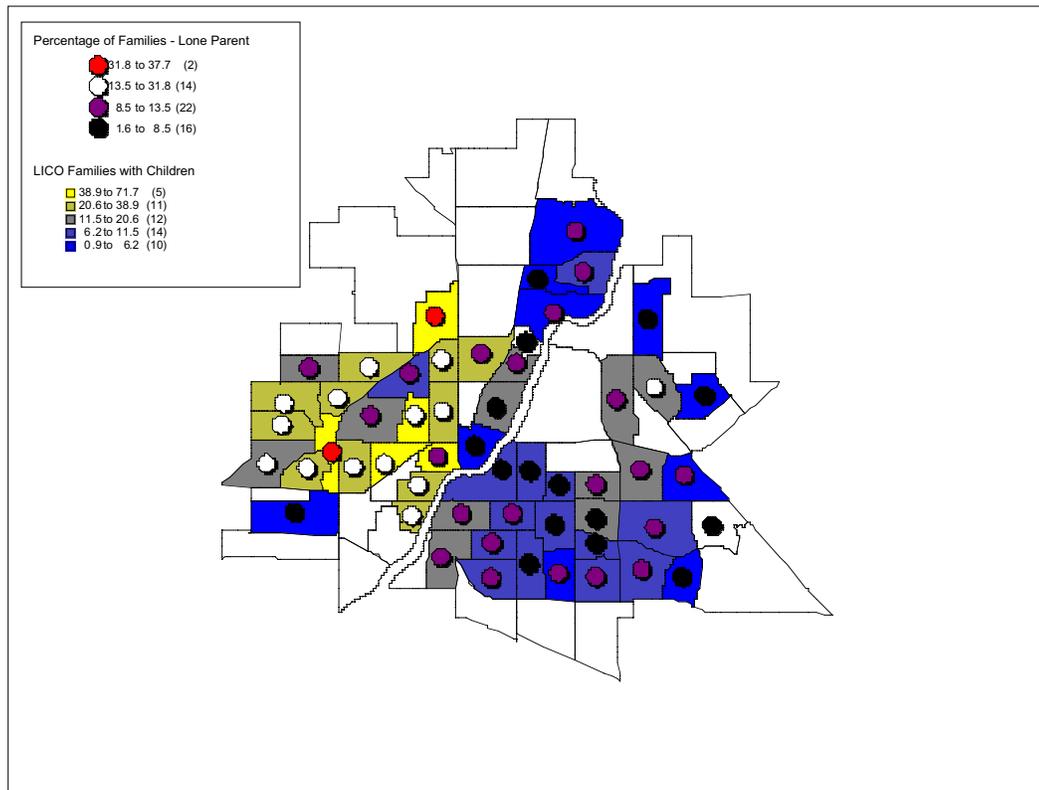
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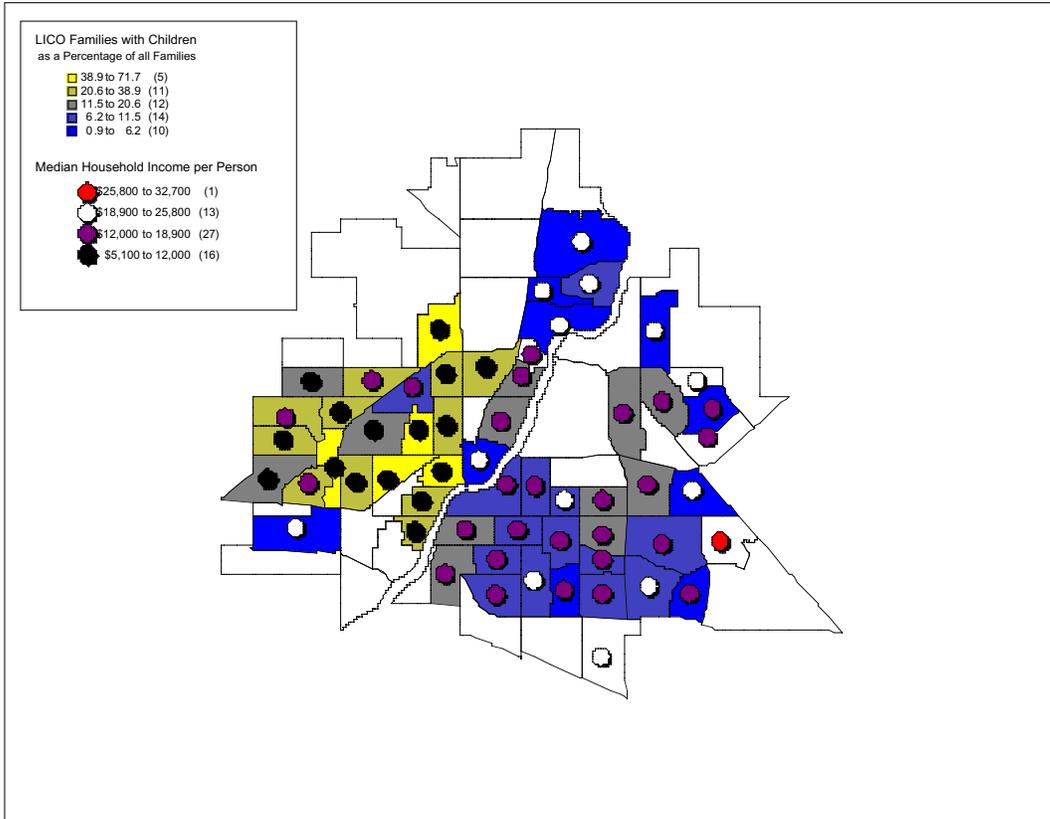
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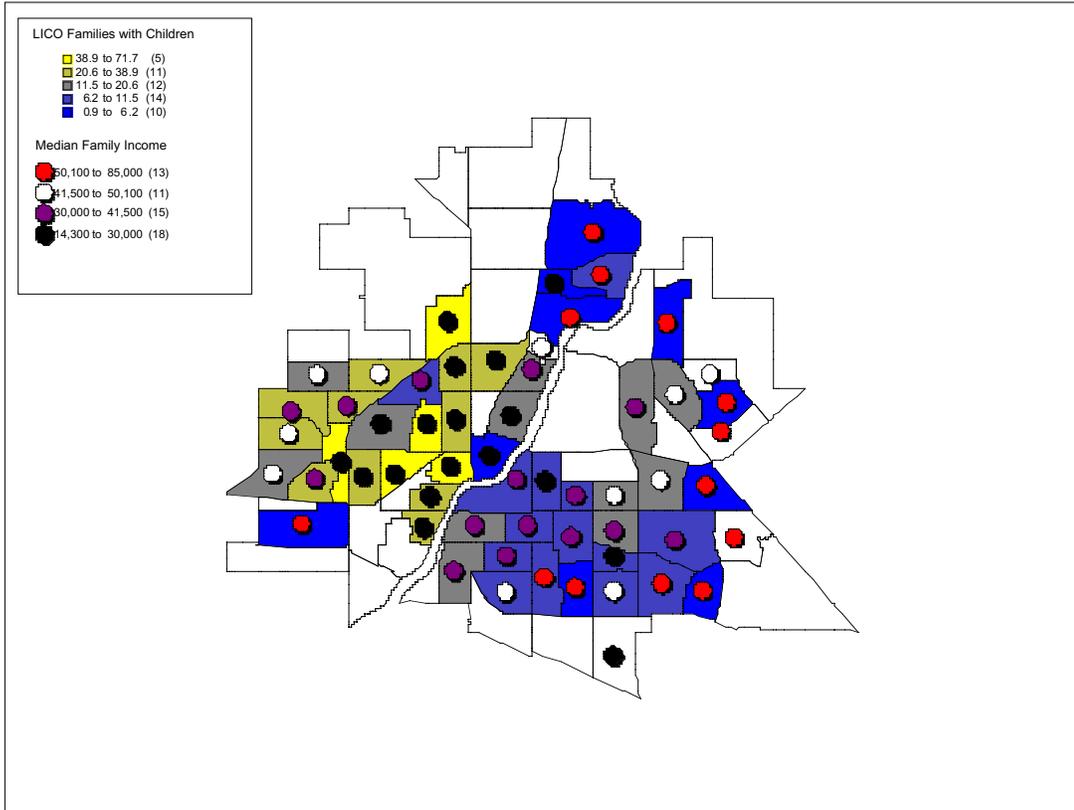
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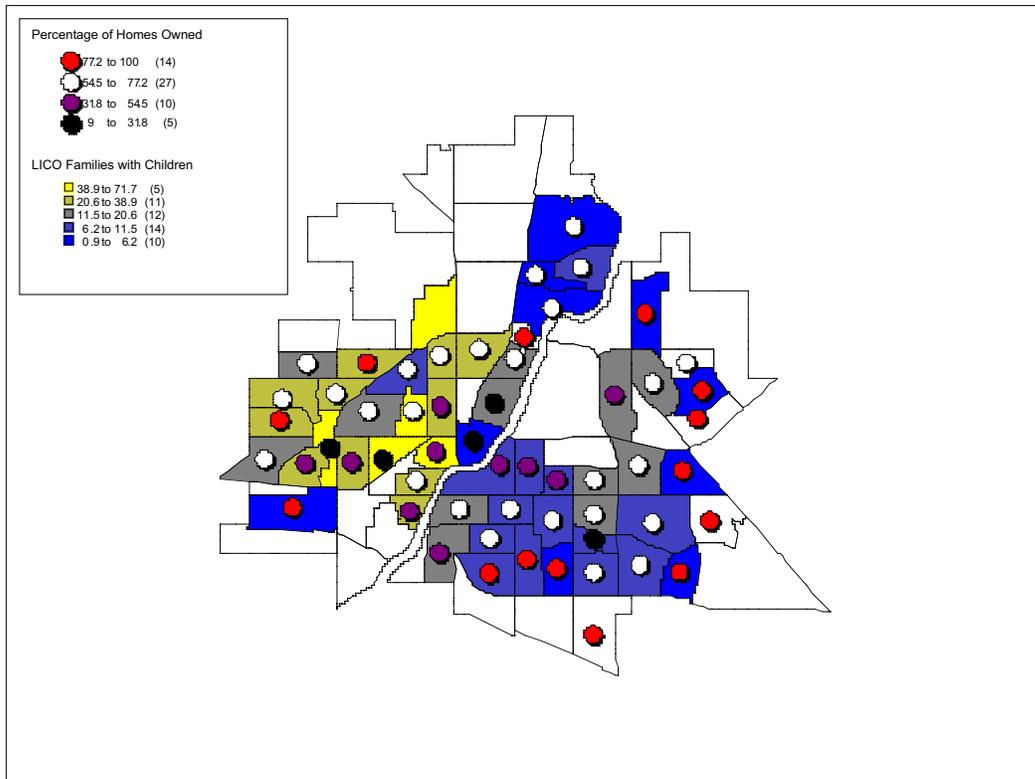
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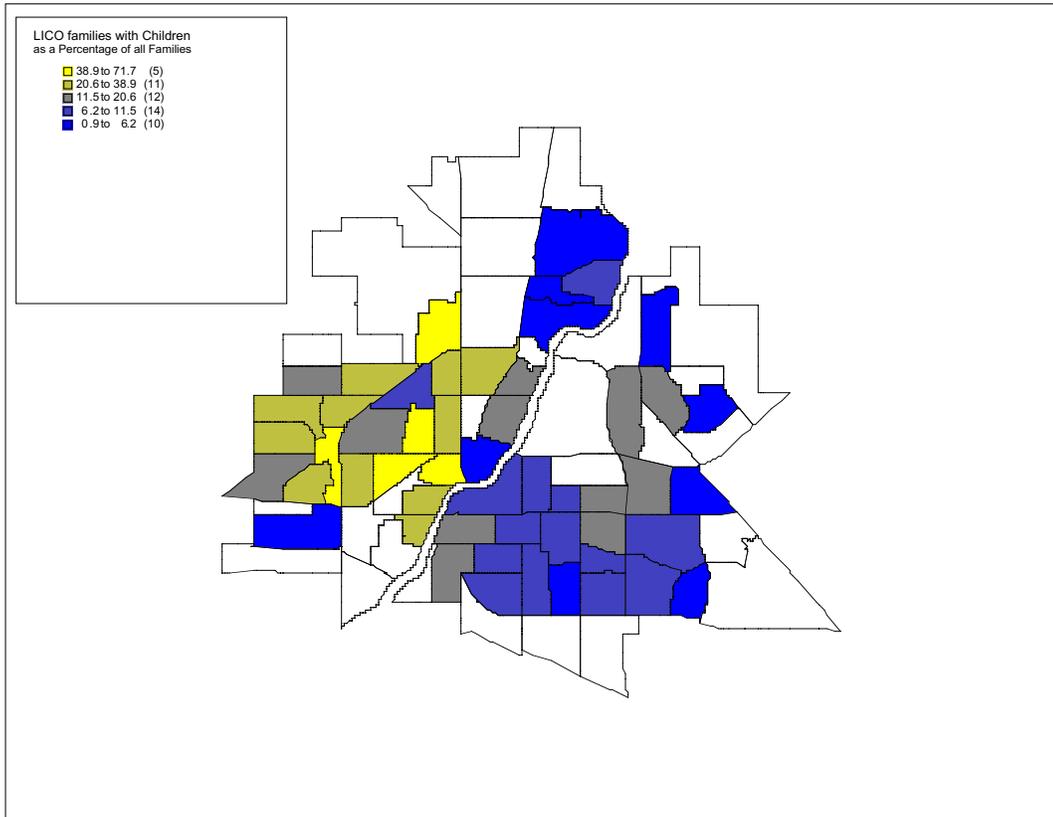
Map 6



Map 7



Map 8



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