



**A series of brief reports on community research with young children  
in the Okanagan Similkameen**

**presented by**



*Understanding  
the Early Years*

*Communities for Kids* is a coalition of three early childhood development initiatives including Children First (a.k.a. *Communities for Kids*), Success By 6® and Understanding the Early Years. It promotes optimal health and development of all children, from conception to age 6, in the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

The Okanagan-Similkameen region referred to in the report is found in the Southern Interior of British Columbia, and includes the geographic area from Summerland (north) to Osoyoos (south) and from Naramata (east) to Princeton (west). The region is also known as the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

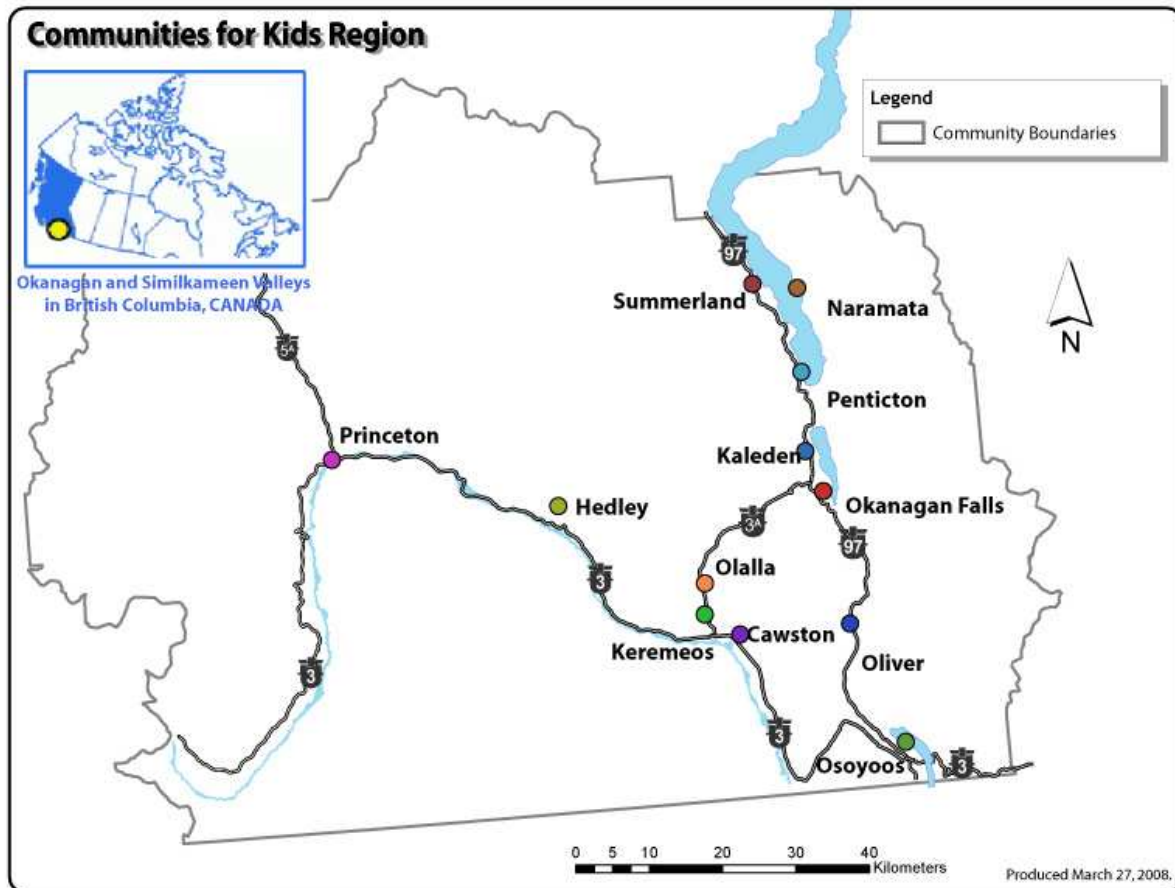
The UEY project is funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, and 21 sites across Canada were part of the 2005-2008 cohort. For more information, visit [www.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca).

THE UNDERSTANDING THE EARLY YEARS BRIEF REPORTS  
FOR COMMUNITIES FOR KIDS  
IN THE OKANAGAN-SIMILKAMEEN REGION  
INCLUDING:

Princeton,  
Keremeos and area,  
Osoyoos,  
Oliver and area,  
Okanagan Falls,  
Penticton and area,  
and  
Summerland,  
British Columbia, Canada

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Okanagan-Similkameen UEY (Communities for Kids Region) Location in British Columbia



Data Source: DMTI Spatial

## **Executive Summary**

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a national initiative aimed at strengthening the capacity of communities to use quality local research to help them make decisions to enhance children's lives. The information presented in these Briefs is based upon data collected with the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS).

The target population for the PIDACS was all children enrolled in kindergarten in the 2006-2007 school term, and their parent or guardian. Kindergarten children were chosen to participate in the Study because they provided valuable information about the influence of preschool experiences. The research data was collected in the children's first formal classroom setting using the Direct Assessment portion of the PIDACS. Telephone interviews were conducted using the Parent Interview portion of the PIDACS. The consulting firm of R.A. Malatest and Associates was awarded the contract to administer the PIDACS and to analyze the data in the UEY communities.

The PIDACS was designed to collect information about children's developmental outcomes, their family and neighbourhood environments, and their early life experiences. A total of 383 families from the Okanagan-Similkameen participated. Parent Interviews were conducted with 320 parents or guardians. They answered questions about their family; social and economic circumstances; activities with their children; involvement in the community; and their children's health and behaviour. Direct Assessments of language, early math skills and early writing skills were completed by 373 kindergarten children. After analysis, the researchers concluded that this PIDACS sample size was sufficiently large to represent all families with kindergarten children in the Okanagan-Similkameen.

The preliminary results of the data collection involving the PIDACS are presented in this document. The comparison data from Canada and British Columbia (BC) used in the first Research Brief (i.e. Family Functioning and Background) was derived from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), Cycle 6 (2004-2005). The Survey indicated that, when the percentage of children living in families with an annual family income under \$30,000 was compared, there was no significant difference between Canada, BC, or the Okanagan-Similkameen. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the unemployment rates of groups of mothers and fathers of children in this study across Canada, BC, and the Okanagan-Similkameen. The Survey also queried high school completion among mothers and fathers of kindergarten children, and reported no significant difference between these groups across Canada, BC, and the Okanagan-Similkameen. Finally, there was no significant difference between Canada, BC, and Okanagan-Similkameen when the single-parent family status of children in this study was compared.

The Canadian comparison data used in the second Research Brief (i.e. Developmental Outcomes) was derived from the other UEY sites across Canada. Direct assessment of children in kindergarten showed that significantly fewer children in the Okanagan-

Similkameen had low scores on the measure of receptive vocabulary compared to other children in Canada. However, significantly more children had low scores on number knowledge and pre-literacy skills (paper and pencil tasks) compared to other children in Canada. The parents' survey responses revealed that there was no significant difference between children in the Okanagan-Similkameen and the rest of Canada on questions about their child's poor health, asthma, allergies or chronic health conditions. As well, there was no significant difference between children in the Okanagan-Similkameen and Canada on the measures of low positive social behaviour or behavioural problems of inattention, anxiety, depression, and physical aggression.

The Canadian comparison data used in the third Research Brief (i.e. Family and Community Support) was derived from the other UEY sites across Canada. There was no significant difference between families in the Okanagan-Similkameen and the rest of Canada on measures of poor family functioning and maternal depression. There was also no significant difference between those comparison groups in questions about the positive parenting practices of love and support, authority, empowerment, and engagement. Parents' assessments of their local neighbourhoods were consistent with the Canadian average, except on the measure of neighbourhood quality, which was statistically below the Canadian average. Compared to the rest of Canada, children in the Okanagan-Similkameen were not significantly different in active participation in sports and other community activities every week. However, significantly more children in the Okanagan-Similkameen attended book clubs and reading programs every month, and significantly fewer children attended educational or science centres monthly when compared to the rest of Canada. Children's monthly use of entertainment and cultural resources was not statistically different than the rest of Canada. However, monthly attendance at cinemas was significantly lower than the rest of Canada. Significantly more children in the Okanagan-Similkameen than in the rest of Canada used beaches and pools, ice rinks and skiing facilities, and recreational and community centres on a monthly basis. Use of parks and recreational trails monthly and use of Provincial and National Parks and campgrounds was comparable to other children in Canada. The prominent barriers to participation were similar to those of other communities. Significantly more parents in the Okanagan-Similkameen identified that available program times were inconvenient and that programs were full or had no space. Compared to other communities in Canada, significantly fewer parents in the Okanagan-Similkameen had concerns about transportation issues or the unavailability of programs in a preferred language.

These Research Briefs, along with other information about the resources, strengths and vulnerabilities of neighbourhoods in the Okanagan-Similkameen region, may assist communities with developing their Early Childhood Development Actions Plans. Please visit [www.communitiesforkids.ca](http://www.communitiesforkids.ca) for further information about Communities for Kids, community resources, and information about early childhood development.

## BRIEF 1 – FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND BACKGROUND

### Research Results

The results presented in this Research Brief give the reader a snapshot of the social and economic context of the Okanagan-Similkameen region. Families and communities play a crucial part in the developmental outcomes of children. Levels of adult education, employment status, average family income and family structure are all important influences on how children thrive. Together, these factors give us a measure of socioeconomic status (SES).

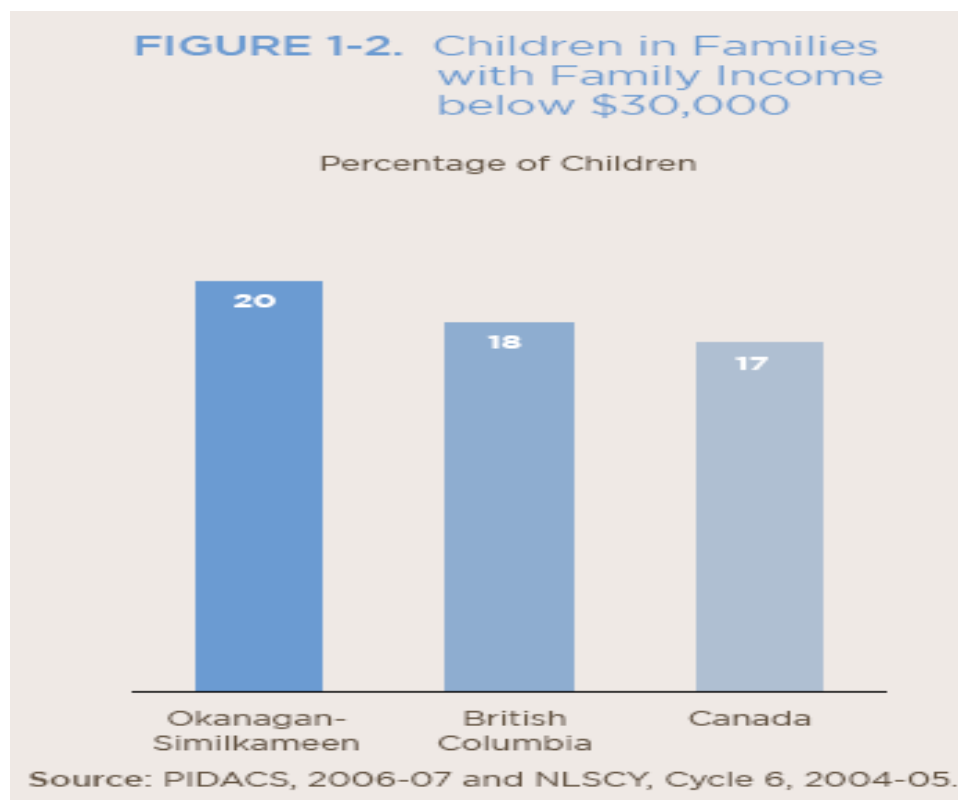


Figure 1-2 shows that approximately 17% of Canadian children and 18% of children in BC lived in families with incomes under \$30,000. In the Okanagan-Similkameen, one in five children, or 20%, lived in a family with this low level of income. These results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in the percentage of low-income families in the region, the province, and the country.

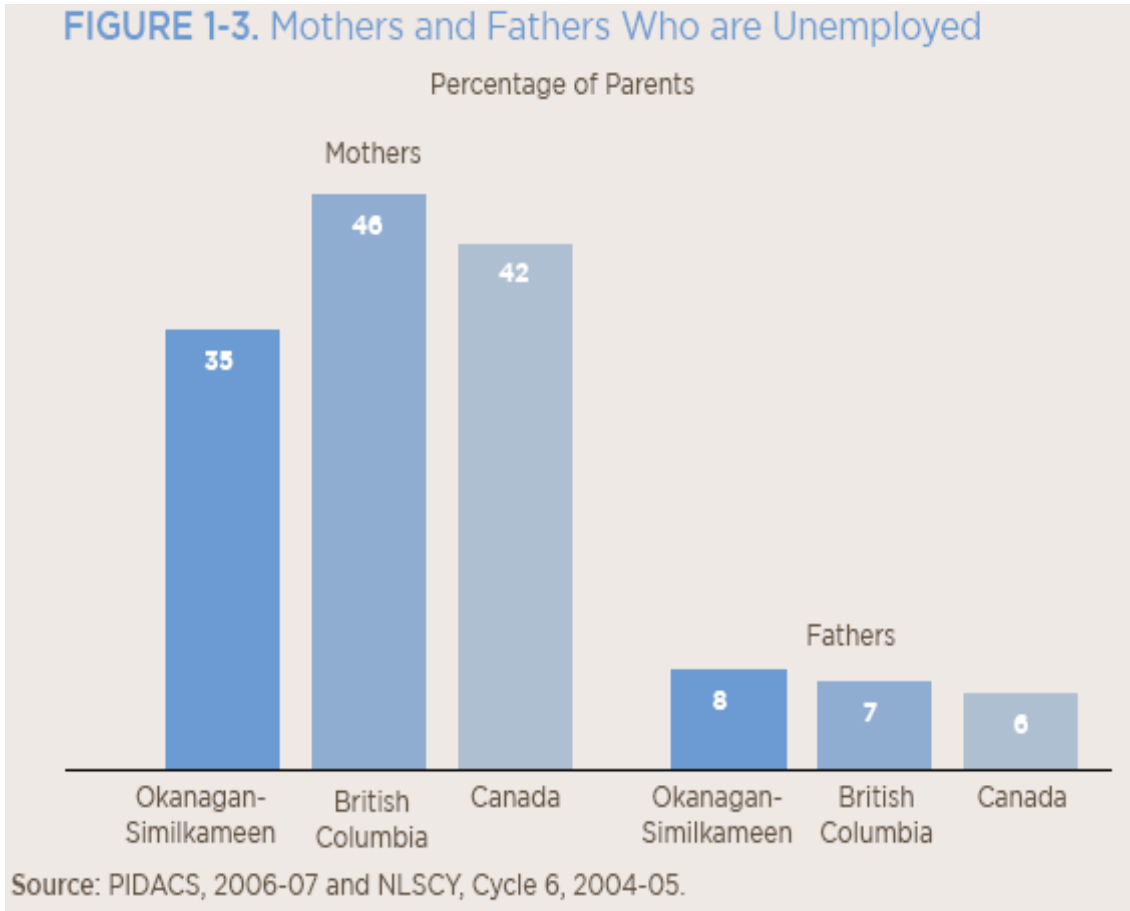


Figure 1-3 indicates that the unemployment rate among mothers of young children in the Okanagan-Similkameen, although not statistically significant, tended to be lower than the rate of unemployed mothers in BC and the rest of Canada. The unemployment rate among fathers in the Okanagan-Similkameen was comparable to the rates for BC and Canada.

These results suggest that there are relatively high rates of employment in the Okanagan-Similkameen. However, the relatively low rates of family income in this region appear to indicate that many of the parents of young children are working in low-paying jobs.

**FIGURE 1-4. Mothers and Fathers Who Had Not Completed Secondary School**

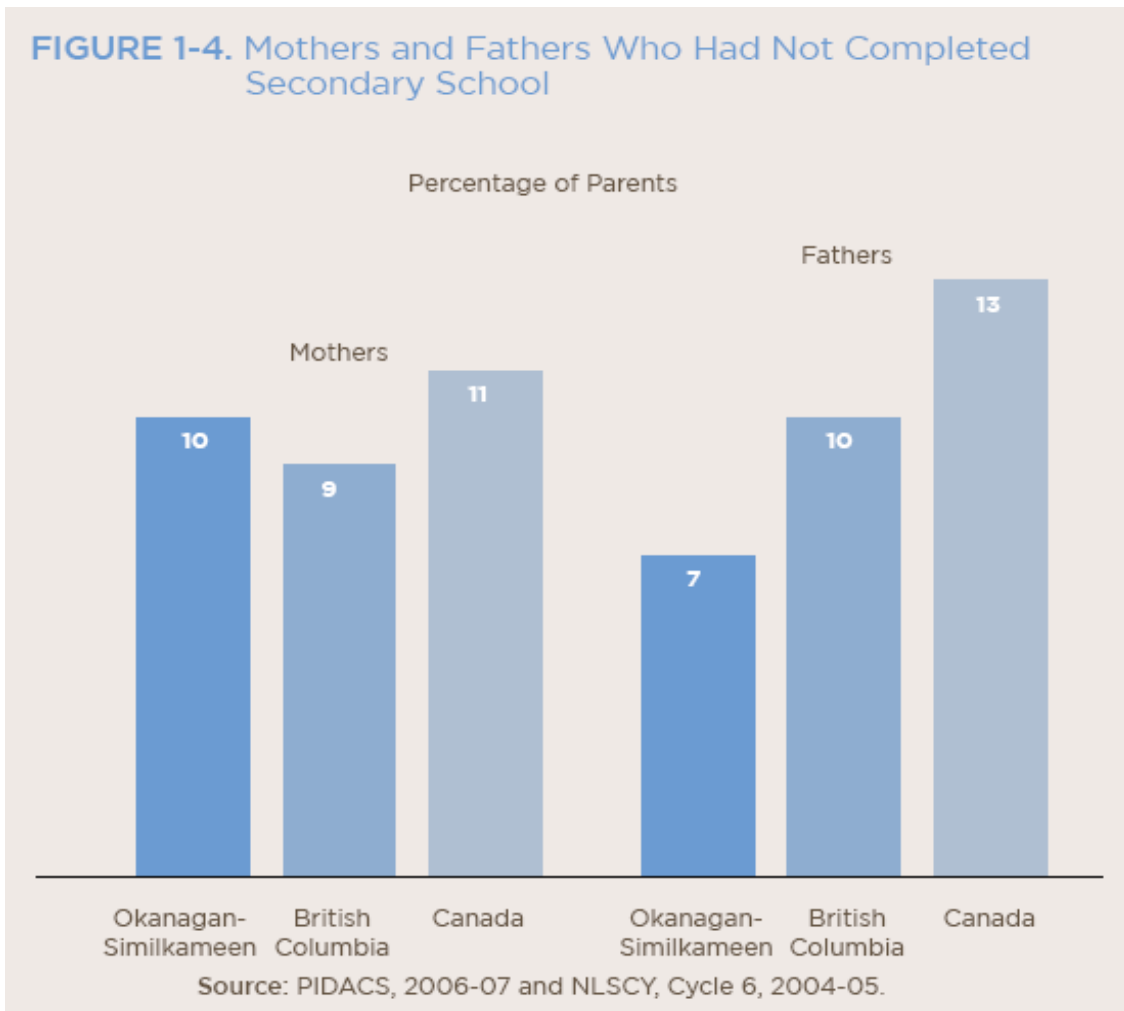


Figure 1-4 shows virtually no difference between the rates of high school completion for mothers in the Okanagan-Similkameen and the rest of BC and Canada. There was a tendency among fathers in the Okanagan-Similkameen to have a slightly lower rate of failure to complete high school than fathers in BC and Canada.

The preliminary results show that parents of young children in the Okanagan-Similkameen have a fairly high level of high school completion.

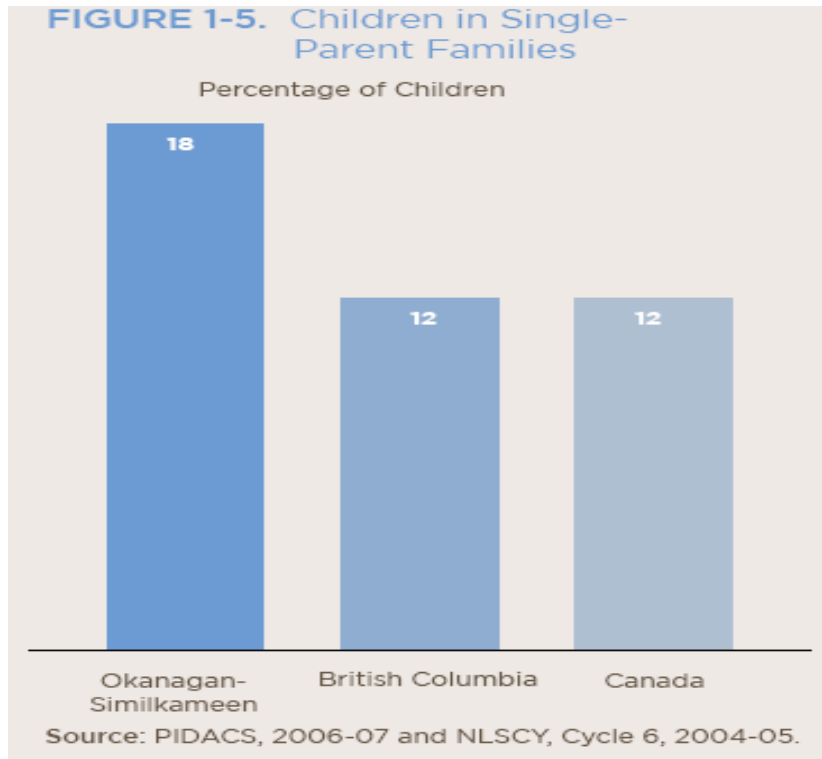


Figure 1-5 indicates that no statistically significant greater percentage of children in the Okanagan-Similkameen lived in single-parent families, compared to BC and Canadian children.

These results indicate that almost one in five children in the Okanagan-Similkameen region lives in a household where only one adult shoulders the responsibility for meeting the child's needs.

## BRIEF 2 – DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

### Research Results

The results presented in this Brief give the reader a snapshot of the health, behaviour and school readiness of children in the Okanagan-Similkameen. Secure, nurturing and stimulating pre-school experiences allow children to thrive. Children who enter Kindergarten prepared to take advantage of the learning opportunities presented at school usually find learning a rewarding and satisfying experience.

#### 1) Direct Assessments

The instruments used to collect the data on the Direct Assessments were:

- 1) The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Revised (PPVT-R) which indicates how well children can match a picture to a spoken word. This is a measure of receptive vocabulary.
- 2) The Number Knowledge Test which measures how well children understand quantity (more vs. fewer), number sequence, and assesses their ability to count and do simple arithmetic.
- 3) The “Who Am I?” Test, which asks children to copy draw, and print.

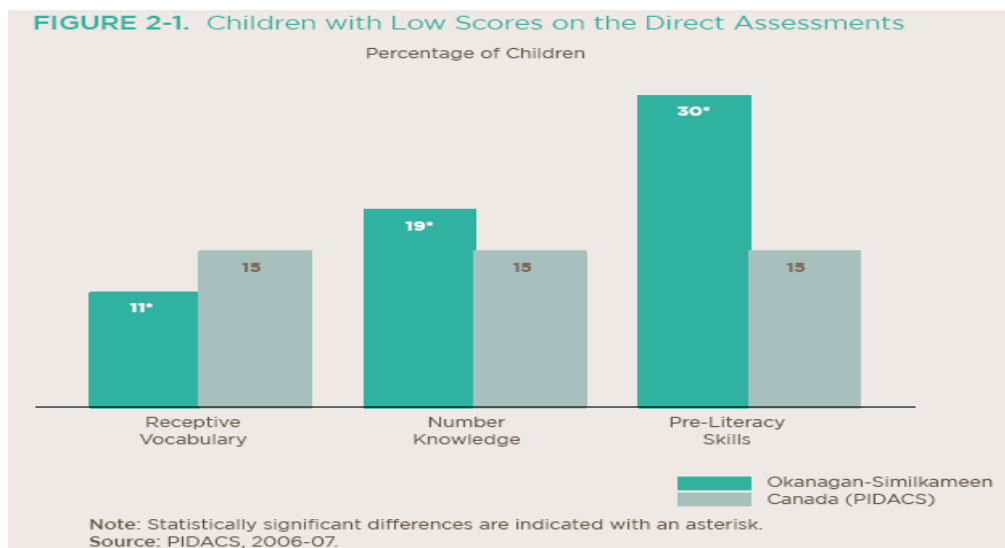


Figure 2-1 shows that, compared to other children in Canada;

- a) **significantly fewer** children in the Okanagan-Similkameen region had trouble with receptive vocabulary (understanding spoken words),
- b) **significantly more** children in the Okanagan-Similkameen region had low scores on the test of pre-math skills, and

- c) **significantly more** children in the Okanagan-Similkameen region struggled with pencil and paper tasks. Almost 1/3 of children in the Okanagan-Similkameen had low scores on this test.

Children with low scores on the Direct Assessments are at risk of having difficulty in school. A low score on the test of receptive vocabulary predicts a child’s struggle with reading and understanding language. Children who have a low score on the test of number knowledge may have difficulty with learning math concepts. Children who score poorly on the test of pre-literacy skills may experience frustration in school tasks of copying and printing.

## 2) Parent Interview

Persons most knowledgeable (usually a parent) who participated in the Parent Interview were asked about their child’s health problems.

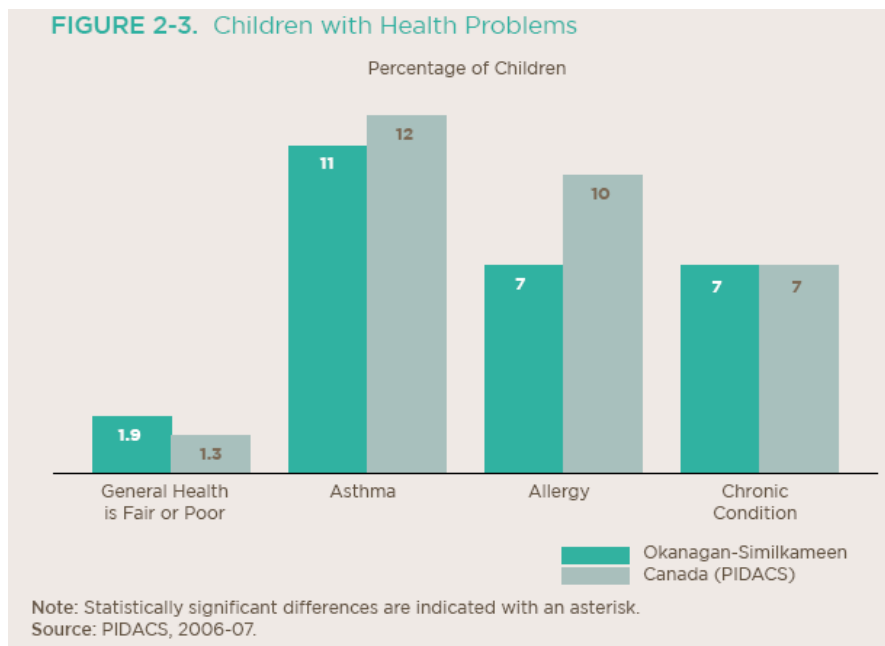


Figure 2-3 shows that parents reported that their children were quite healthy. Less than 2% of parents in the Okanagan-Similkameen had concerns that their children were in poor health. Responses about asthma, allergy or other chronic health conditions indicated that children in the Okanagan-Similkameen did not differ significantly from other Canadian children.

Parents were asked about their child's social or behavioural challenges:

- 1) Positive social behaviour questions, for example, asked about the child's level of cooperation, attitude towards helping, and concern for others.
- 2) Questions about inattention focused on the child's ability to concentrate and follow through on a request.
- 3) Anxiety was associated with behavioural responses such as excessive crying, nervousness and worry.
- 4) Depression was queried through survey items about sadness and lack of enjoyment.
- 5) Questions about physical aggression asked about bullying and attacking people or property.

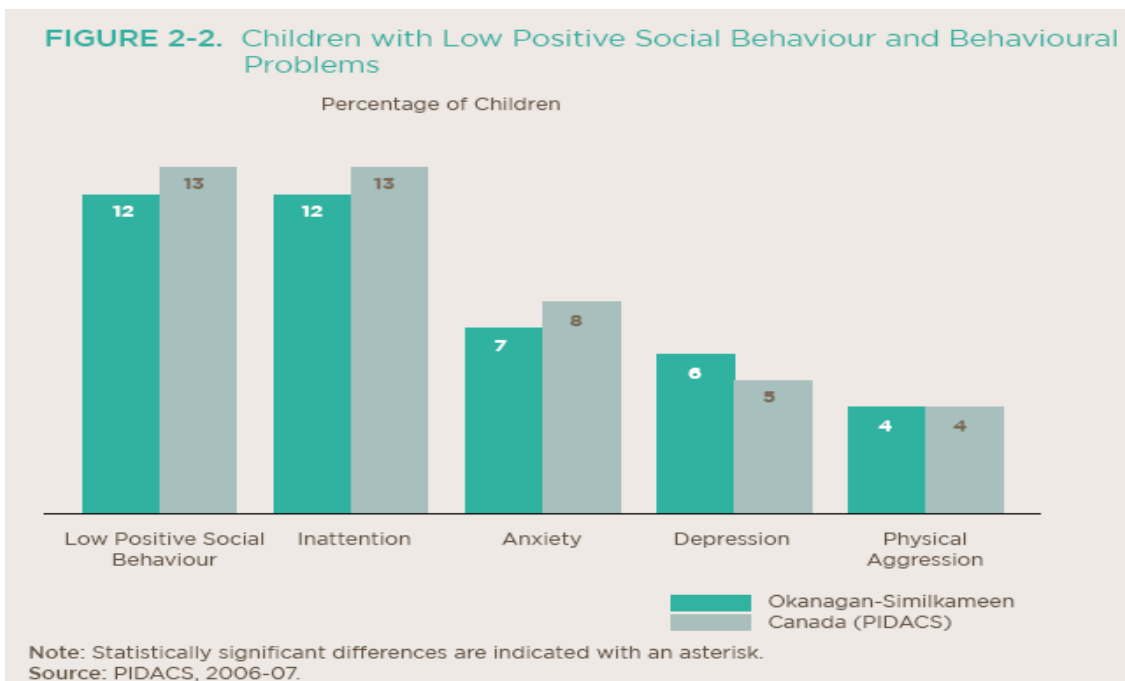


Figure 2-2 indicates that the incidence of behavioural problems in children in the Okanagan-Similkameen was the same as the rest of Canada. Statistically, there was no significant difference between children in the Okanagan-Similkameen and other children in Canada on measures of low positive social behaviour, inattention, anxiety, depression and physical aggression.

## BRIEF 3 – FAMILY AND COMMUNITY REPORT

### Research Results

The results presented in this Brief give the reader a snapshot of family and community life. Information was gathered from the person most knowledgeable (usually a parent) who participated in the Parent Interview.

In Section 1, participants were asked about;

- a) family functioning and maternal depression,
- b) parenting practices, and
- c) neighbourhood characteristics and social support.

In Section 2, participants were asked about;

- a) their child's participation in sports and other activities,
- b) their child's use of educational, cultural and recreational resources in their community, and
- c) barriers to the use of programs and resources.

Children's development is enhanced when families provide comfort, security and stimulation. Supportive, stable neighbourhoods with accessible resources such as playmates, playgrounds and green space, as well as adequate facilities, offer children the opportunity to develop their skills and sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world around them.

## Section 1 – Family and Community Life

### a) Family Functioning and Maternal Depression

Information was gathered about: family communication; openness to discussion of feelings and concerns; family decision-making and problem-solving; and how family members got along. Maternal depression was measured by responses to a set of statements about cognitive, emotional, and behavioural signs of depression.

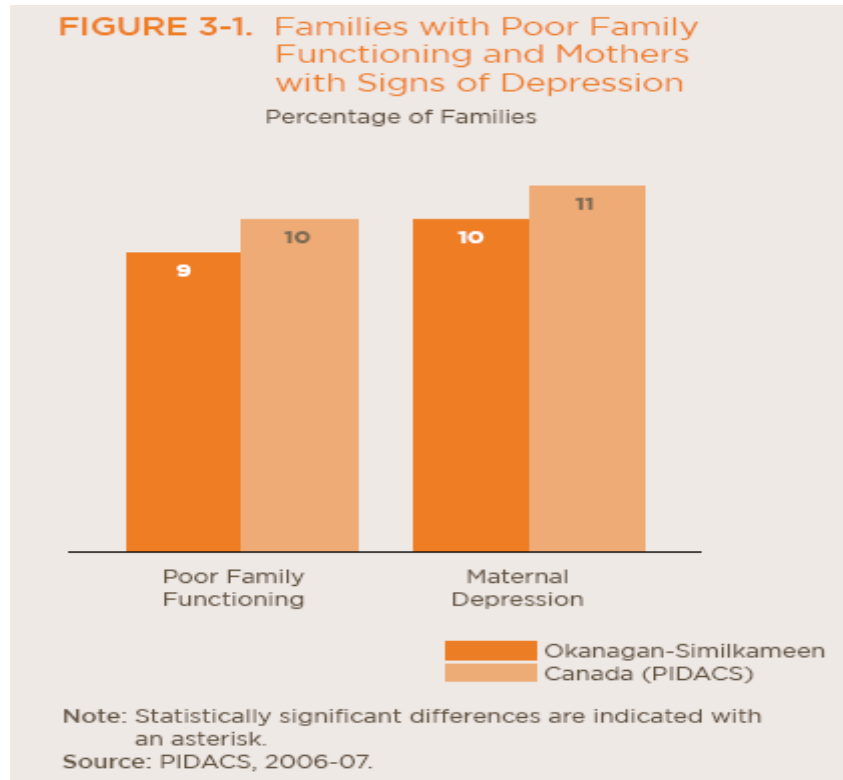


Figure 3-1 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between Okanagan-Similkameen families and the rest of Canada in either of these measures.

The results indicate that the majority of parents in the Okanagan-Similkameen have the skills to create the best possible emotional family climate for their children.

## b) Parenting Practices

The four areas queried were:

- i) Love and Support, measured by the parent's warmth, responsiveness to their child's needs, and encouragement of their child's efforts.
- ii) Authority, which indicated whether the parent set boundaries and insisted on compliance, as well as guided the child to appropriate behaviour.
- iii) Empowerment, measured by parent behaviours of providing opportunities for child self-expression and pursuit of their interests, as well as modeling and encouraging social and moral behaviour.
- iv) Engagement, which captured the responses of time spent with children in playing, reading, singing and participating in physical activities.

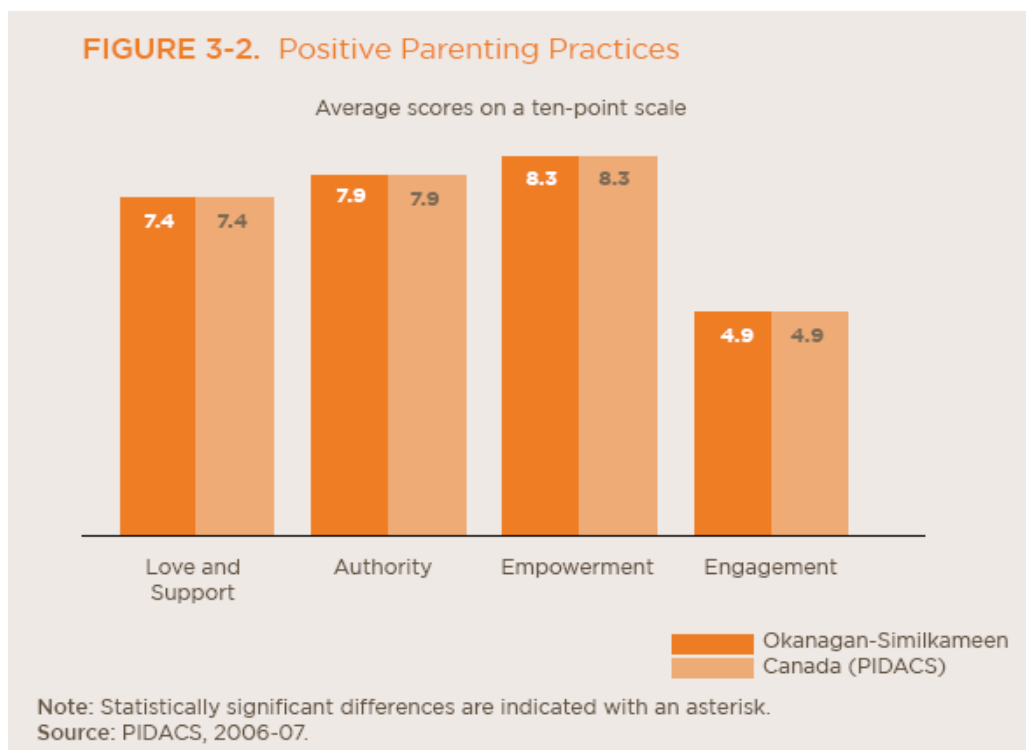


Figure 3-2 shows that the scores on each of these parenting practices in the Okanagan-Similkameen were identical to the Canadian average.

One of the most important aspects of parental engagement with children is reading together. In the Okanagan-Similkameen, 83% of the parents read to their child at least daily, compared to 77% of other Canadian parents. Reading with children provides an opportunity for closeness, it develops literacy, and it enhances children's communication skills.

### c) Neighbourhood Characteristics and Social Support

Participants were asked questions about the following neighbourhood and other community factors which impact child rearing:

- i) Neighbourhood quality was measured through questions about other children in the neighbourhood, whether schools and preschools were located nearby, easy access to playgrounds and facilities, and the availability of public transportation.
- ii) Safety questions focused on the comfort level of adults walking alone after dark, the safety of children playing outside during the day, and the physical safety of parks and playgrounds and their equipment.
- iii) Cohesion queried whether neighbours helped one another, whether the neighbourhood came together to socialize or to problem-solve, whether neighbours watched out for children and vacant homes, and whether the neighbours were role models for children.
- iv) Social Support tapped answers regarding feelings of warmth in interactions with family and friends, the availability of people whom parents could turn to for support or advice, and the opportunities to socialize with people who shared their interests, attitudes and concerns.

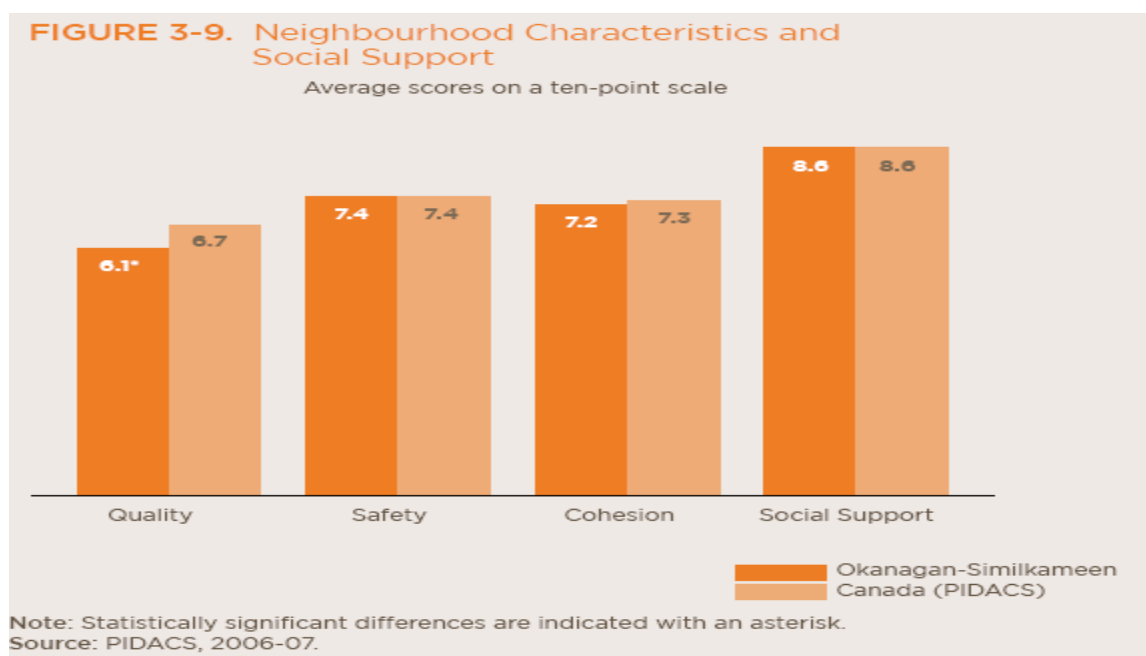


Figure 3-9 shows that most scores were comparable to the Canadian average. However, the score of neighbourhood quality was **significantly lower** in the Okanagan-Similkameen, compared to the Canadian average.

The lower rating of neighbourhood quality may reflect the rural nature of the Okanagan-Similkameen. Families are more spread out than in an urban centre, and facilities are located in the core area of towns. Public transportation is not available in the smaller communities. Many families need to travel fair distances in order to access resources and social opportunities.

## Section 2 – Participation in Community Activities

### a) Children’s Participation in Sports and Other Activities

Participants were asked the number of times per week that their child was engaged in sports and other activities. Organized sports were defined as involving a coach or instructor. Unorganized sports were defined as activities that were less formal, such as running, swimming, bicycling or neighbourhood sports. Community Programs were defined as groups such as Beavers, Sparks and church groups.

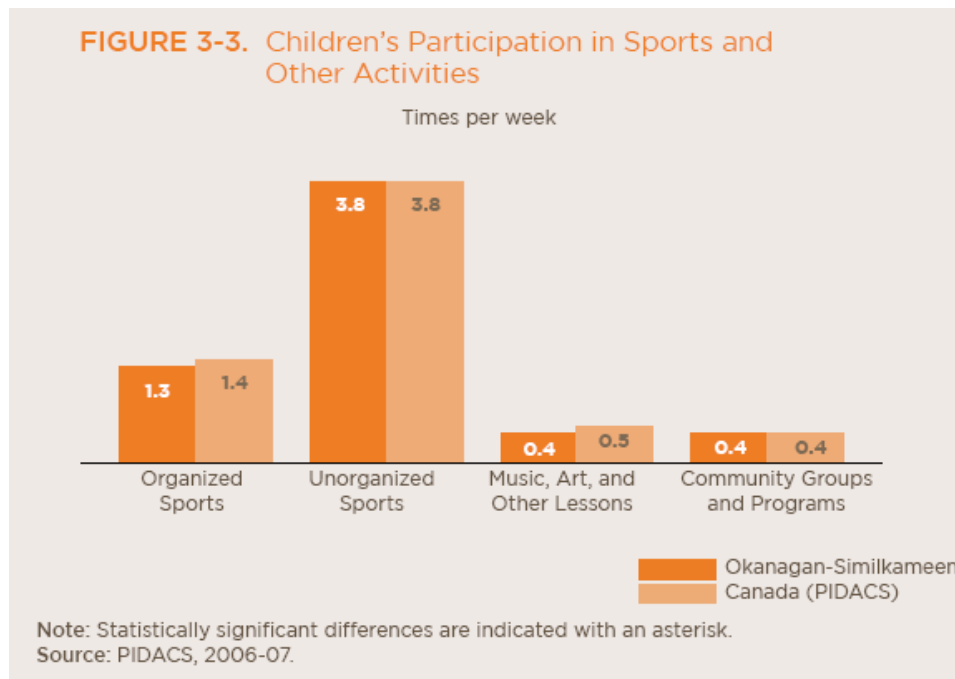


Figure 3-3 indicates that participation in all activities was comparable to the Canadian average.

As well, participants indicated that children in the Okanagan-Similkameen spend 1.7 hours per day watching television or videos, which is equivalent to the Canadian average of 1.6 hours per day.

## b) Child's Use of Educational Cultural and Recreational Resources

The following three figures summarize data concerning use of resources within the community.

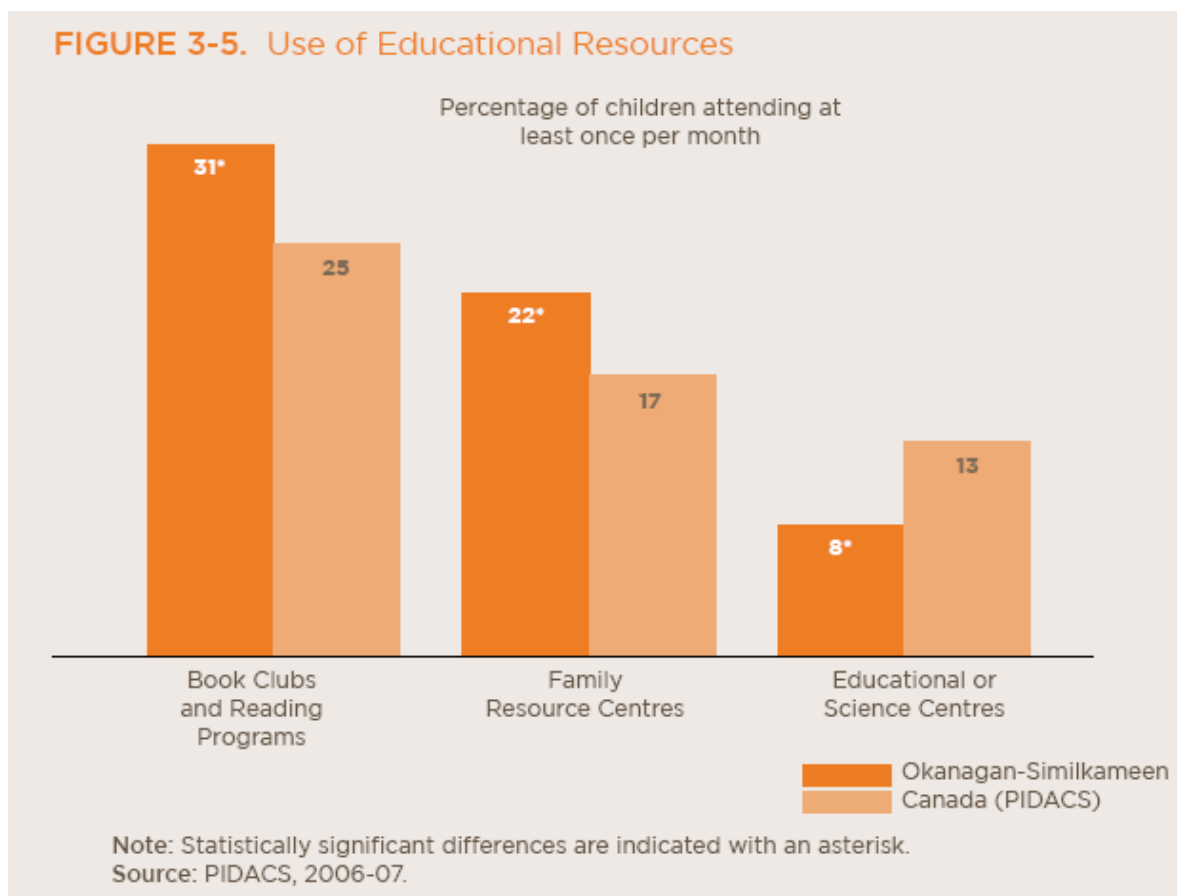


Figure 3-5 indicates that rate of attendance by Okanagan-Similkameen children at various resources compared to other children in Canada is as follows:

- Book Clubs or Reading Programs – **significantly higher.**
- Family Resource Centres or drop-in centres – **significantly higher.**
- Educational or Science Centres – **significantly lower.**

Since the scores were not adjusted for the availability of resources, it is possible that the less frequent use of educational or science centres in the Okanagan-Similkameen may be due to the unavailability of these resources in the communities. The relatively high rate of attendance at Reading Programs and Family Resource Centres may indicate that they are available and accessible to families.

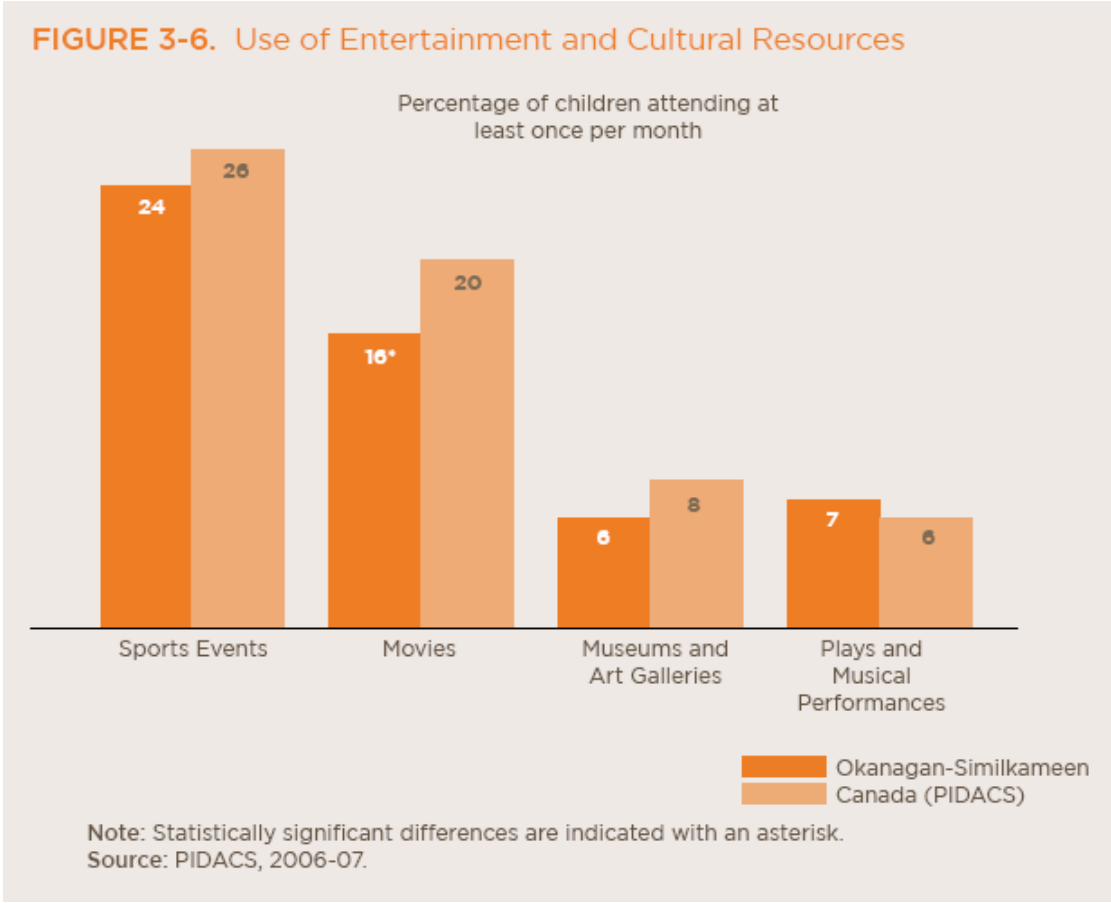


Figure 3-5 indicates that the use of entertainment and cultural resources, as well as attendance at sports events, museums, galleries, plays and musical performances was comparable to the Canadian average. However, the rate of monthly attendance at movies is **significantly lower** in the Okanagan-Similkameen than in the rest of Canada.

It is possible that movie attendance in the Okanagan Similkameen is lower due to the unavailability of these resources in some communities.

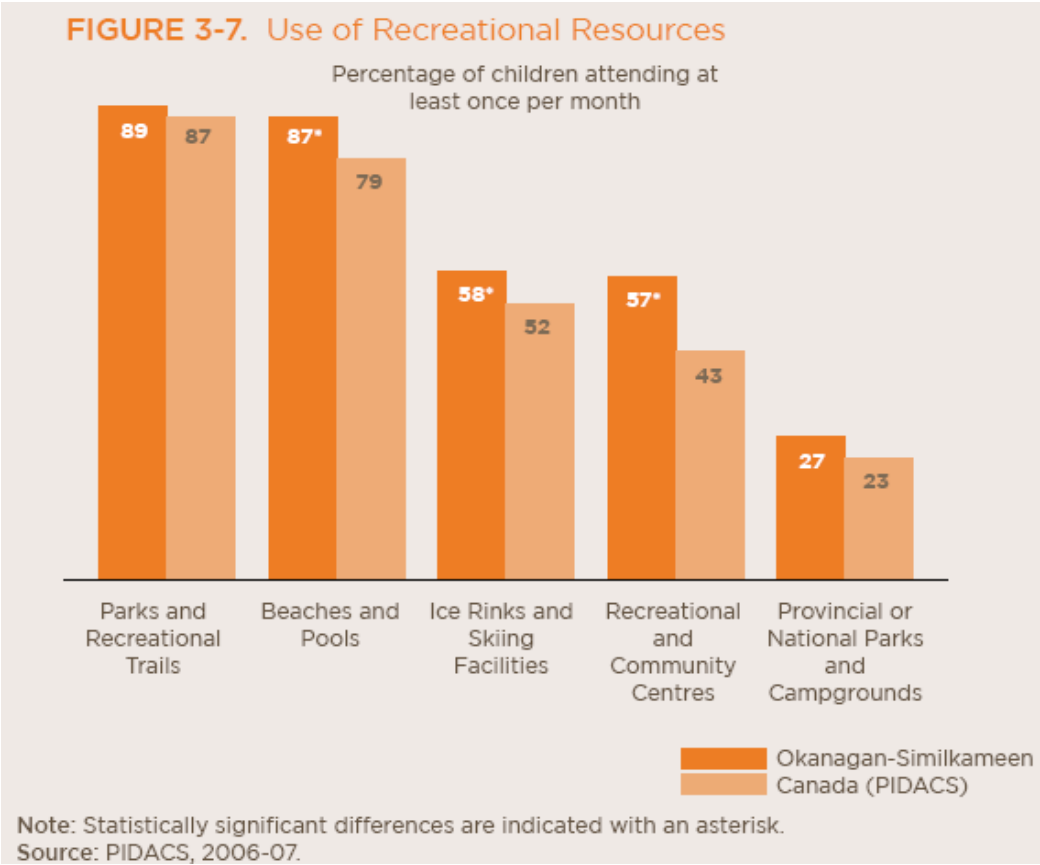


Figure 3-7 shows the use of parks, green spaces, playgrounds, hike-and-bike trails, National or Provincial parks and campgrounds, was comparable in the Okanagan-Similkameen to the Canadian average. However, beaches and swimming pools in the Okanagan-Similkameen were used at a **significantly higher** rate, as were arenas and skiing facilities. As well, recreational and community centres were used at a **significantly higher** rate in the Okanagan-Similkameen than in the rest of Canada.

These data indicate that the majority of families in the Okanagan-Similkameen are committed to pursuing recreational opportunities with their children. Natural resources such as lakes and mountains in the area undoubtedly draw families to use them. Virtually all communities have a local arena and community/recreation centre.

### c) Barriers to the Use of Programs and Resources

Respondents were given an opportunity during the parent interviews to comment on the barriers to their children’s participation in community activities.

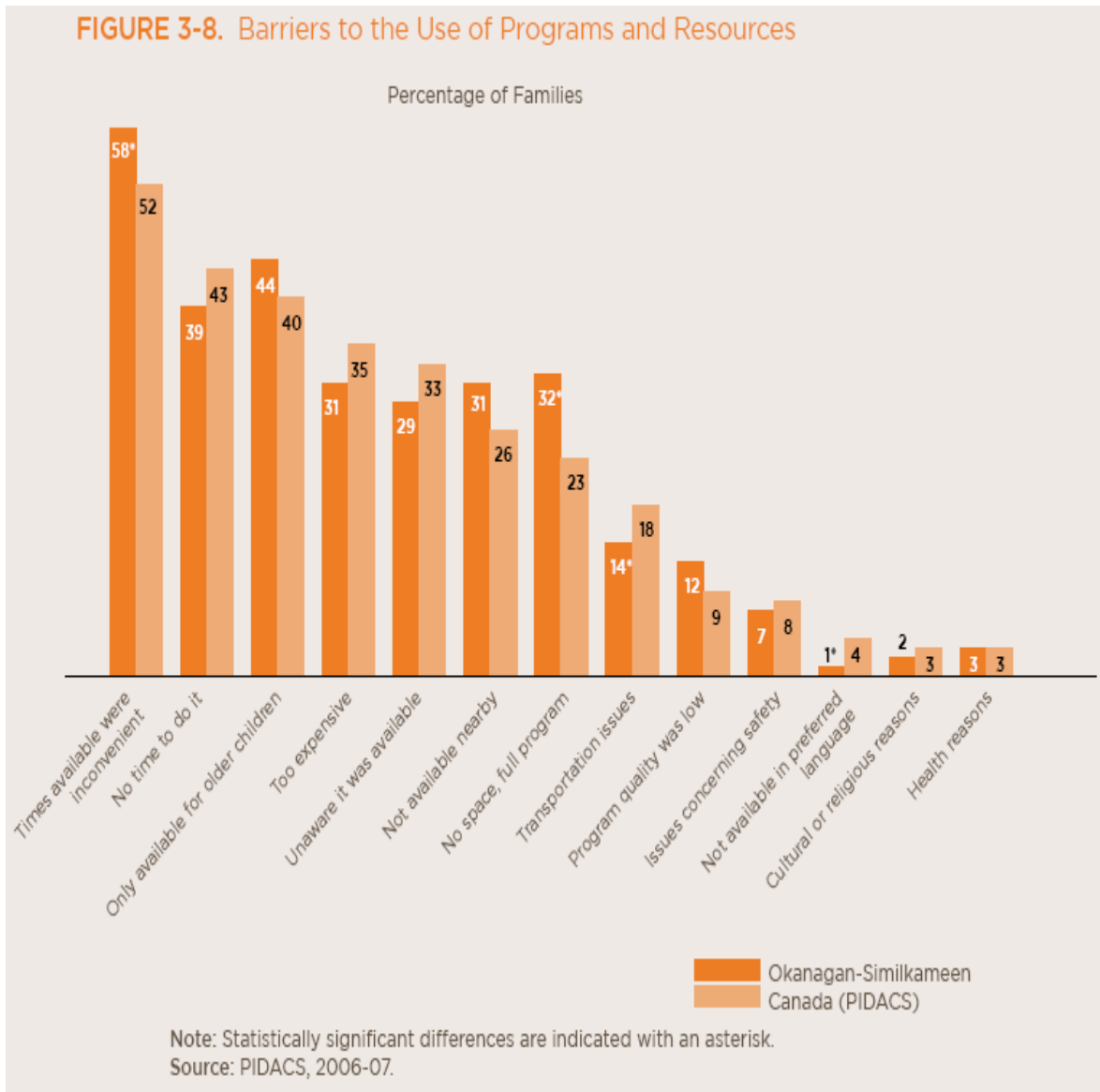


Figure 3-8 depicts the 13 reasons which impeded the use of community programs and resources. Two barriers listed by a **significantly greater** number of Okanagan-Similkameen parents than the Canadian comparison, were “times available were inconvenient” and “no space, full programs”. Two barriers listed by **significantly fewer** parents in the Okanagan-Similkameen were “transportation issues” and “not available in a preferred language”.

It appears that the profile of barriers to program attendance in the Okanagan-Similkameen was similar to the Canadian profile.

Please note that resources in communities in the Okanagan-Similkameen were identified in the Community Mapping Project. A directory of resources plus maps of resource location are available at [www.communitiesforkids.ca](http://www.communitiesforkids.ca). Click on the Community Resources Directory link on the top right of the Home Page and follow the instructions.