



CPRN RCRPP

Review of Canadian Quality of Life Survey Data

Matthew Mendelsohn

Executive Summary

**Review of Canadian Quality of Life Survey Data is available
at <http://www.cprn.org> or on request at (613) 567-7500.**

Review of Canadian Quality of Life Survey Data

Matthew Mendelsohn, Department of Political Studies, Queen's University

Executive Summary

A search of academic and commercial surveys of Canadians was undertaken for four types of questions: 1) how satisfied Canadians were with their “quality of life”; 2) their satisfaction with a number of elements of their lives that we deemed to be important to “quality of life” (e.g., their personal health); 3) their satisfaction with how the system was performing on a number of elements we deemed to be important to “quality of life” (e.g., the health care system); and 4) what things they thought were important to a good quality of life.

The initial goals were to assess the evolution of Canadians’ perceptions of their quality of life over the past decade and identify which elements were most important to Canadians for a good quality of life. These goals proved impossible to meet.

- There is surprisingly little tracking data on Canadians’ quality of life. This is a major shortfall if one is interested in assessing changes in Canadians’ quality of life over time.
- No major attempt to measure Canadians’ assessments of their quality of life has been undertaken since the Quality of Life Survey in 1981.
- Survey questions on quality of life have been subject to frequent changes – sometimes major, sometimes minor – based on the goals of particular studies and changes in the social and economic environment. These changes in question wording affect the responses significantly and make broad conclusions about the evolution of assessments of quality of life very difficult.

This report therefore identifies weaknesses in existing data and the possible approach necessary for the development of a quality of life index. It does not describe with great precision Canadians’ evolving attitudes toward their quality of life, which appears to be impossible from available data.

Canadians’ perceptions of their quality of life do not change dramatically over short periods of time, yet long-time series data are not available. It is therefore crucial to create an index that is replicated every year so that the research community can identify real changes in Canadians’ perception of their quality of life.

The available data do seem to indicate that Canadians are generally satisfied with their quality of life. Perceptions of quality of life seem to be affected negatively by economic recession and by the popularity of the government, with the election of new governments provoking an improved

perception of quality of life. Canadians are happiest with their family and personal lives, and least happy with their financial situations. Their jobs, health, and standard of living fall somewhere in between.

The ability to track how Canadians feel about their quality of life is seriously constrained by the available data and we therefore recommend the development of an integrated battery of questions.

- This battery should be developed in consultation with the public opinion research community and the CPRN. This battery should consist of two to three general questions asking Canadians about their quality of life, as well as questions dealing with 1) individuals' satisfaction with various aspects of their own lives (e.g., their incomes); 2) individuals' satisfaction with various aspects of Canada (e.g., the Canadian economy); and 3) individuals' judgements about what things they consider most important for a good quality of life.