CPRN RCRPP

Quality of Life Indicators Project

Learning from Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life

Final Report on the December 12th QOLIP Workshop

Ottawa, Ontario

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Learning from Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life
December 12, 2000 Workshop Report

Executive Summary

On December 12, 2000, CPRN held a workshop for the Quality of Life Indicators Project. The purpose of the workshop was to review the findings of 40 dialogue sessions with people across Canada to ask what matters to them for quality of life, to develop recommendations for indicator practitioners who will create a prototype set of national indicators reflecting citizens' priorities which can be used to track Canada's progress in quality of life over the years.

Thirty-eight participants attended the workshop in Ottawa, including representatives of the Steering Committee, participants in the dialogue sessions, and a number of indicator practitioners.

The report reflects the deliberations of the workshop and the guidance provided to indicator practitioners. A list of supporting documents is attached. These can be found on the CPRN website www.cprn.org in the Corporate section

Quality of Life Indicators Project
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1. Purpose of the workshop
On December 12th, CPRN marked another milestone in the Quality of Life Indicators Project (QOLIP) as it brought together citizens, members of the project Steering Committee and indicator practitioners to:

- Learn about the results of the analysis of the 40 dialogues which took place across the country;
- Based on those results, develop recommendations for indicator practitioners who will create the prototype set of national indicators to track Canada's progress in quality of life over the years.

2. Introduction/Opening remarks
Judith Maxwell, President of CPRN, welcomed participants, including those participating by teleconference. She noted that we had expected that students from Woodstock, New Brunswick and Trois Rivières, Quebec would also be on telephone lines; however, snowstorms kept the students and a number of others from joining the discussions.

Mrs. Maxwell reviewed the objectives for the day. With the Quality of Life Indicators Project nearing completion, next steps would include working with partners in order to:

- Refine the analysis as a result of these discussions
- Develop a prototype set of indicators
- Produce a report card on Quality of Life
- Produce a project report for dialogue participants, funders, Steering Committee members and others interested in this work.

Mrs. Maxwell's introduction was followed by a round-table in which participants introduced themselves, indicating their interest and experience related to the QOLIP.

3. Results of Dialogue Sessions
Following introductions, Joe Michalski, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Trent University, presented an overview of results of the 40 dialogue sessions with 350 participants across Canada. To anchor these findings, he reiterated the goals of the QOLIP, reviewed the dialogue protocol and its implementation as well as the selection process for participants. He also provided a snapshot of the composition and demographics of the dialogue groups. See Annex 1 for his slide presentation.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to comment on the findings and to raise any questions or concerns. Mrs. Maxwell noted that it was particularly important

for participants to have a solid understanding of the meaning of the information in order to have a common basis for setting priorities in the afternoon breakout groups.

The open and thoughtful discussion that followed probed aspects of the findings as well as aspects of the dialogue process itself. A summary of this discussion follows.

What are the similarities and differences in the findings between individual and group rankings? There is considerable consistency between what individuals identified as priority areas in both pre- and post dialogue questionnaires and in what groups as a whole identified as priorities. There appeared, however, to be a disjunction with respect to what is called "general values" in that, on average, individuals identified these as eighth on their lists and groups identified them as number one. Joe noted that this seems to be a byproduct of the different nature of the two processes. The questionnaires asked individuals to rank or identify what is important to quality of life, which usually produced more specific institutional responses (education, health, etc). In the discussions, however, people were able to elaborate a bit more on what was important to them, and this is where their values tended to surface, often in relation to the institutional domains.

How to account for the invisibility of significant issues: Questions were raised about significant issues that did not surface as often as expected in some dialogue groups, such as health care or young peoples' access to post-secondary education. Workshop participants wondered to what extent this was because dialogue participants all wanted to go beyond issues they felt were generally accepted as important.

Joe noted that, broadly speaking, health, education, environment, social programs, and economy dominated the priorities of individuals in questionnaire responses, and while they were also discussed in the dialogue groups the groups did not restrict themselves to these 5 major factors. Within these categories, there are many sub-themes discussed in the dialogue groups which will be explored in further detail in the final report.

Sandra Zagon noted that most high school participants were generally younger (Grades 9 and 10) and may have been more concerned about their immediate school environment rather than post-secondary education which was at least two years away.

Workshop participants asked whether important issues did not surfaced because they were outside the "normal" agenda? Two examples were posed. The first was the possibility of subtle gender bias in situations where women in dialogue sessions raised issues that may have been subtly dismissed. The second was that although clean environment was noted, climate change was not.

Joe's responses highlighted several points:

- Analysis to date is quite broad, with detail still to come. People talked not only about general issues like clean environment. Their more detailed discussions also

included many aspects of a clean and healthy environment, such as renewable energy, climate change and greenhouse gases.

- The dialogue process took place over 2.5 to 3 hours and covered dozens of issues; depth is necessarily limited. Nonetheless, more esoteric issues, particularly related to environment, did emerge and these will be reflected in a more extended analysis.

- With respect to gender differences, there is considerable research on the ways in which gender distribution and composition affect group processes. The broader cultural environment may still be inhibiting women in discussions. This may be reason to consider some groups that are all women and some that are all men in future processes. In these dialogue groups, moderators were trained and sensitive to being inclusive, non-judgmental and encouraging, and skillfully assisted participants in making points while sidestepping/avoiding heated debate.

What does ranking mean in this context? Workshop participants asked about the significance of the rankings of issues by citizens. It was noted that all mentions by citizens were important. The dialogue sessions did not provide rankings, and citizens were not ranking pre-selected issues. Thus whatever citizens mentioned was considered important. The things that appear higher in the lists reflect the issues selected by dialogue participants more frequently and which were chosen for further exploration in their discussions.

Joe noted that although dialogue participants received background material and a sample set of cards, they were encouraged to build on those themes and to go beyond them, which they did. The draft results to date provide an overview of common elements. The final report will provide greater detail.

Will further analysis reflect income differences? A workshop participant noted that dialogue participants were characterized as urban or rural, influencers or non-influencers. His research indicates differences in public attitudes and opinions that are driven by income, with correlation between education and income, and wondered whether this study provides information on the relationship between attitudes and income.

Joe agreed that income is a key variable, though in this research, there is not a question related specifically to income. The best proxy in this case, though it is highly imperfect, is home ownership, which does not appear to be an important predictor of what people identify as being important to their quality of life. We also have education, which has generally also not yielded significant differences in responses, and occupation. Further analyses will determine if any of these factors either alone or in combination helps predict responses.

Were there any surprises? Was there any sense that the indicators that emerged were expected? Did we learn anything we did not already know?

 Joe responded by noting that we likely had some preconceptions and expectations based on the extensive work to date on quality of life. At the same time, this process was determinedly neutral and encouraged people to talk about whatever was important to them. Joe noted that he was struck by the fact that the findings demonstrated the importance to Canadians of community involvement, and of having the capacity to participate and influence outcomes. In essence, dialogue participants appear to want more opportunities to be involved, to talk together and to influence government. Overall, different groups seem to have more in common than is reflected in the current public and political discourse. Researchers and students assisting with the analysis were also struck by the positive responses to the dialogues themselves.

What is the direction of the relationship between health care and access?   A workshop participant asked whether people are healthier because we have better access to health care or because we have reduced incidences of various diseases?

While this question was not specifically asked in the sessions, dialogue participants made it clear that they wanted to maintain a universal health care system and wanted to see it improved.

What were people saying about primary and secondary schools/education? Joe noted that the focus of the education discussion was on a universal education system and on quality education. People across the country talked about the current learning environment, whether education was being adequately funded, whether enough programs were available, whether teachers were being adequately compensated, whether early childhood education was being adequately funded, and whether student/teacher ratios were appropriate. They also want greater access to education after high school as well as opportunities for continuing education and lifelong learning. Overall, access to quality education is seen as a cornerstone that demands attention.

What did people talk about in relation to healthy communities? Joe replied that this was a little harder to get a handle on. People did talk about healthy communities in conjunction with the environment. Young people expressed concerns about pollution, safe water, etc.

A workshop participant noted that in her dialogue group the idea of a healthy community included having some control over what happens in your community. Joe affirmed this and added that several groups also talked about having greater control over resources within their communities. People also included availability of policing, hospitals and emergency services in their notions of healthy communities.

Another workshop participant noted the emphasis in his dialogue group on issues related to single parents and education, in particular to the need to help parents learn to take charge and become more responsible for their actions in particular with respect to their children.

What were public issues and what were private issues? The presentation seemed to focus on public issues, which raised the question of whether the dialogue sessions were oriented more toward what society could do rather than personal happiness. Joe noted that dialogue participants did seem to agree that informal aspects of social life and community life are relevant to quality of life. He also noted that dialogue participants are expressing a political sensibility around what government should be doing and what individuals, families and communities might focus on. Further analysis would explore the extent to which people articulated concerns about what they thought should be public and what they thought should be private.

A workshop participant asked whether more affective dimensions such as inclusion, exclusion, commitment and trust surfaced in the discussions. Joe noted that a number of groups talked about inclusion with respect to feeling part of a community.

Can we have a regional analysis: Given the apparent degree of consistency in views across the country, will there be any regional analysis? Joe noted that some comparisons have been done between urban and rural groups, which indicated some differences. For example, urban groups tended to express more concerns about safety within their communities, while rural groups – as expected – talked about agriculture more. While some regional analyses are possible, these will likely be quite limited due to the sampling limitations and small numbers of cases within each region.

Given the sample size, is the information meaningful? A question was raised about the ability to generalize from these results, given the small sample size. This was in particular reference to the numbers of young people in the dialogue sessions and their apparent lack of reference to post-secondary education.

Joe noted that further analysis should clarify whether students discussed post-secondary education. He also noted the importance of generating a more expansive or inclusive sense of what people considered important. We cannot, from this sample, reliably predict what percentage of Canadians, for example, will rank health care as their number one priority. We can, however, note that a great many people acknowledge health care as important and we can describe a number of the key issues about health care that seem to matter to people.

4. Introduction to Working Groups

Doug Norris, Statistics Canada, briefed workshop participants on their tasks for the afternoon working group sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to develop recommendations for the key aspects or dimensions of quality of life for which indicator practitioners would identify specific indicators in their work on December 13th.

Doug reminded participants to draw primarily on the raw material provided by citizens and referred them to Table 5 of the Preliminary Results which sets out the themes and sub-themes identified by citizens as important dimension or aspects of quality of life and Table 6 which identifies priorities of different categories of groups (urban, rural, influencers, hard-to-reach, youth).

Workshop participants were assigned to four groups, based on themes which emerged in citizen dialogues: People, Communities, Economy, and Environment. Each group included a moderator and recorder. In addition, indicator practitioners acted as resource people in each group.

The aim of the working groups was to identify for each theme the most important 5 dimensions to be measured and tracked. Five was considered a somewhat arbitrary number, and groups were encouraged to identify their top 3 plus 2 additional ones.

5. When the rubber hits the road

Over lunch, Dr. Blair Feltmate, QOLIP dialogue participant and Partner, Sustainable Investment Group, Ltd., spoke by teleconference about what is being done with indicators and indexes in the world of corporate financing and investment. Slides of his presentation can be found on the CPRN website.

6. Working Groups' reports to plenary

Drawing on information from the presentation of dialogue results and the overview of citizens' preferences and priorities in each theme area, participants worked to specify the key dimensions to be measured and tracked. Each group presented their discussion to plenary.

7. Conclusions and next steps

This workshop focused on dialogue group results in an effort to identify key aspects of quality of life determined by citizens. Mrs. Maxwell thanked all participants for attending. She noted that input from this session would be invaluable to indicator practitioners in their meeting on December 13th, and that a report on this session would be circulated early in 2001. A separate report will be prepared for the December 13th gathering. Wishing everyone a happy and healthy holiday season, Mrs. Maxwell adjourned the workshop.

Annex 1   Quality of Life Indicators Project Public Dialogue Results, slide presentation

Supporting Documents: These can be found on the CPRN website www.cprn.org in the Corporate section.

- December 12th Agenda
- List of Participants, December 12, 2000
- Quality of Life Indicators Project: Background (M. Wyman)
- Quality of Life Indicators Project Preliminary Results: Public Dialogue (Joe Michalski)
- Task Statement for Working/Breakout Groups
- Guidelines for Moderators, Recorders and Indicator Practitioners/Experts
- Working Groups Composition
- Biography, Blair Feltmate
- When the Rubber Hits the Road, slide presentation (Blair Feltmate)
- Working Groups' Reports to Plenary
- One Step Closer to Quality of Life Indicators for Citizens, CPRN News Release, December 15, 2000

Quality of Life Indicators Project: Public Dialogue Results

Joseph H. Michalski, Ph.D.
Trent University

Canadian Policy Research Networks' QOLIP Workshop
**December 12, 2000**

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Project Overview

- Quality of life in Canada
- National indicators
- Citizenship engagement

Project Goals

- Learn about issues that citizens consider of value to their quality of life

- Create prototype of national indicators reflecting issues that matter to citizens

- Develop road map for future work to arrive at national indicators that support what citizens want or value

- Communicate the efforts and results to a broad cross-section of Canadians
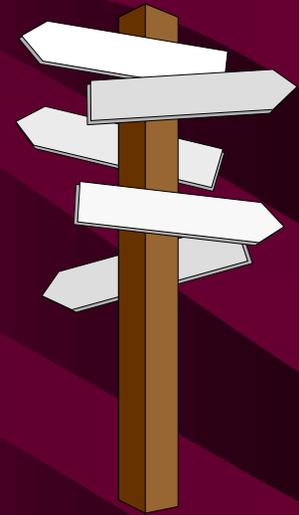
Dialogue Implementation Protocol

- Professionally-trained moderators
- Independent recorders with laptop computers
- Tape-recordings of each session
- Participant questionnaires (pre- and post-dialogue)
- Moderator feedback

FOR MORE INFO...

See Miriam Wyman's CPRN draft paper entitled *Quality of Life Indicators Project: Background* (December 4, 2000)

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Selecting Dialogue Participants: Quasi-Random Sampling Process

- Environics' recruitment guide selection criteria
  - ten participants per session
  - even split between men and women
  - mix of age groups and education backgrounds
  - divided among opinion leaders and others
  - both official languages
- Random telephone contacts or those who have participated in prior research
- 150 participants for 20 groups across Canada

CPRN's Recruitment Process: Purposive Sampling Procedures

- Non-profit agencies, foundations, steering committee members, and moderators

- Recruited seven "influencer" groups, five "hard-to-reach" groups, and three youth groups

- Agriculture Canada provided contacts for three rural groups in various locations across Canada

- Two additional groups recruited by CPRN

Dialogue Group Description

- Forty groups with nearly 350 participants
- Twenty-nine urban and 11 rural settings
- Thirty-four English- and six French-speaking groups
- Twenty-five "random" groups, seven "influencers," five "hard-to-reach," and three youth groups

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 1: Public Dialogue Locations and Group Descriptions

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Dialogue Group Composition

- Nearly even split between men and women
- Aged 16-86 (average of 43): 7% seniors (65+), 14% under 25,and 52% between 35-54
- Half (51%) married or common law, 30% never married, 16% divorced/separated, 3% widowed
- Sixty percent lived with children under 18, 20% lived alone, and 24% as couples (no children)
- Eight-seven percent born in Canada; 80% spoke English as first language and 11% French

More Demographics on Participants

- High education levels, with nearly 70% having some college or university (16% with post-graduate degrees, common among influencers)

- Most with full-time (43%) or part-time (20%) labour force attachment, with 15% students

- Some 63% of adults owned their homes

- Health status: excellent (23%), very good (42%), good (26%), fair or poor (9%)

Quality of Life in Canada

Figure 1: Quality of Life in Canada

"Over the past five years, the QOL of Canadians in general has..."
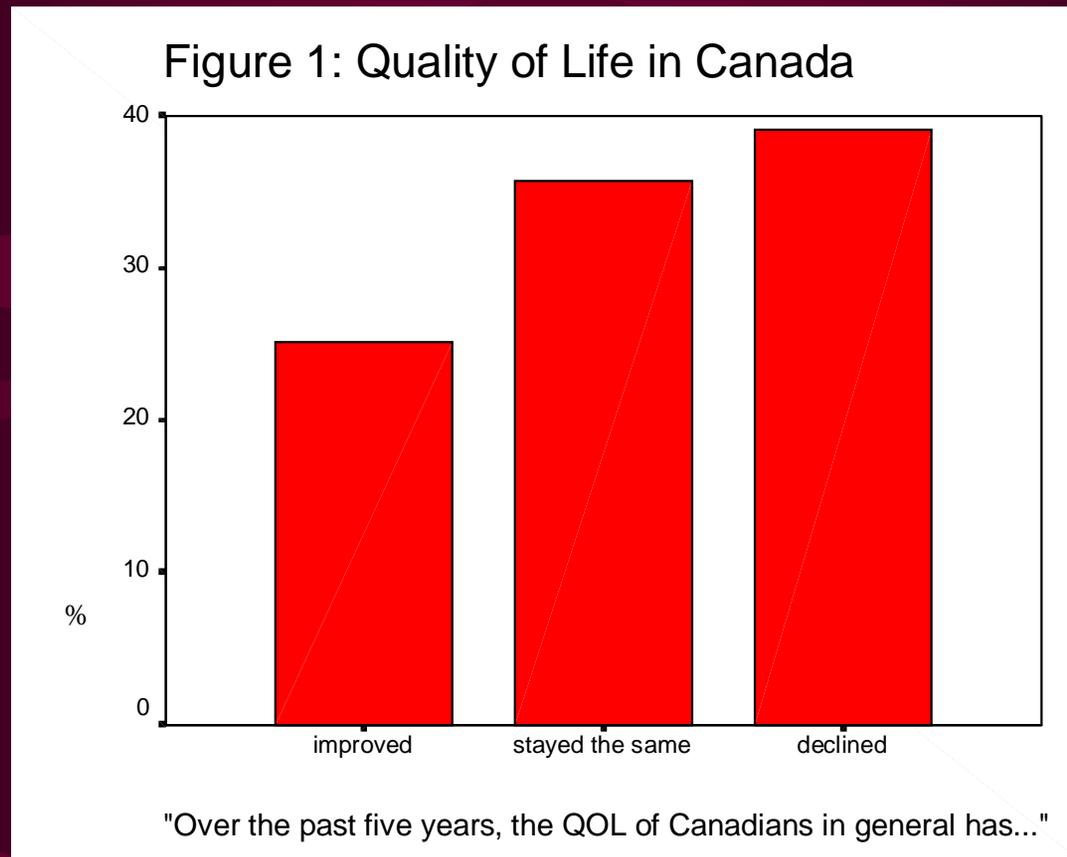
Satisfaction with Quality of Life

- High satisfaction with family, friends, health, work or main activity, standard of living, schools

- Higher proportions dissatisfied with public services, environment, stress levels, finances, free time, balance

- Satisfaction increases with age; U-shaped pattern characterized satisfaction with free time, balance, standard of living, job security, government services, and quality of life in one's province

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 2: Percent Satisfied with Dimensions of Quality of Life, Pre-Dialogue Assessments ($n = 331$)

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Important QOL Factors

- Highest ranked factors pre- and post-dialogue: health programs, clean environment, education

- Highly ranked factors: secure employment, low poverty rates, low unemployment rates, low crime rates, and social programs

- Participants consistently ranked other factors as lower, forming a continuum

- Consistency of responses pre- and post-dialogue

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 3: Importance of Factors Contributing to Quality of Life in Canada

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Highest QOL Priorities: Questionnaire Responses

- First tier: health care system, education, the environment, social programs

- Second tier: economy, government, legal or justice systems, general values

- Third tier: all other factors cited by no more than one in ten participants

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 4: Percent Identifying Highest Priorities, Factors Contributing to QOL in Canada, and Factors Contributing to Personal QOL   13

"Important" Factors for QOL versus "Priorities": A Comparison

- Most factors considered to be "important" contributors to QOL were ranked as "priorities"

- Education and social programs often considered priorities, even though not as frequently mentioned in terms of importance

- Economy, justice system, personal values, and work life viewed as important by many, but not as often ranked as priorities

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Public versus Private Issues

- Some issues were considered important for Canada and at personal level, including health, education, and the environment

- Some issues were emphasized more as private concerns, including family and friends, several work dimensions, community or religious issues, and cultural pursuits

- General values increased in importance from pre- to post-dialogue discussions, both at personal level and as public issue

Developing Collective Portraits

- Nearly every group discussed political rights, education, the environment, social programs, and health

- More participants cast votes for these as priorities areas than any other themes

- Personal well-being, legal or justice systems, economy and work received much discussion

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 5: Total Groups Discussing Selected Quality of Life Issues and Prevalence of Sub-Themes Across 39 Groups

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Prominent Sub-Themes

- Civic involvement and participation, civil rights
- Education accessibility and quality
- Healthy environment, clean air/water
- Income support programs, basic needs, housing
- Health care and physical health
- Personal well-being, healthy balance
- Safe communities (public safety)
- Employment rates and job opportunities
- Child and youth programs
- Lower taxes, responsible fiscal policies

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Group Clusters: Common Themes

- primary and secondary education
- health care access
- a healthy environment, clean air and/or water
- taxation
- public safety or security
- employment opportunities and job security
- a living wage
- social programs
- children/youth programs
- time use or balance
- civic participation

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 6: Quality of Life Priorities Identified by Different Group Clusters

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Group Clusters: Differences

- **Influencer cluster** stressed education, governance, meaningful work, economic growth, basic needs, wealth redistribution, family supports, healthy communities, cultural diversity

- **Hard-to-reach cluster** stressed education access, alternative health, job training/upgrading, cost of living, affordable housing, range of social supports, stress reduction, animal rights, attitudes toward disabled, community resources

FOR MORE INFO…

See Table 6: Quality of Life Priorities Identified by Different Group Clusters

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More Group Cluster Differences

- **Urban cluster** stressed physical health, health care system, public trust, crime rate, toxic waste, community resources, healthy communities

- **Rural cluster** stressed health promotion, crime rate, benefits/compensation, small business, agriculture, poverty rates, childcare/daycare, quality food, personal well-being

Youth Groups' Priorities

- Mental health
- Fair legal/justice system
- Meaningful work
- Fair wages
- Higher minimum wage
- Reduce youth discrimination
- Cost of living
- Small business support
- Equality of treatment
- Respect for young people
- Healthy child development

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Identifying Quality of Life Indicators: Process Issues

- Much time devoted to collective portraits, setting priorities, and linkages

- Challenging aspect to identify indicators in public dialogue discussions

- Common to discuss "social problems" and "indicators" alike in dialogue groups

Potential Indicators

- Several commonly used indicators proposed for health care, education, environment, social programs, economy, government, and work

- Measures of work life, community, and family/ friends intended to capture stability or continuity

- Relatively few indicators proposed for issues such as information, infrastructure, cultural pursuits, multiculturalism

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General Reactions of Participants

- Important to monitor quality of life

- Dialogue process exerted positive influence on participants, with mutual respect

- Though some were not happy with state of quality of life, most of the disaffected at least somewhat optimistic about potential to track quality of life

- Vast majority expressed tremendous enthusiasm for dialogue process

Further Analyses

- Examine similarities and differences between French and English discussions

- Explore impact of age or life stage in relation to quality of life issues

- Determine whether immigrants have distinct perspectives

- Study whether presence of children or other family background characteristics influence quality of life views

- Workshop participant suggestions?

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