

General Social Survey Preliminary Views 2005

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1. Introduction

The General Social Survey (GSS) is one of a range of new surveys to be developed as part of the Programme of Official Social Statistics (POSS). The programme aims to establish a coherent system of official social statistics across the government sector by:

- consolidating existing surveys into a managed programme
- introducing new surveys to fill information gaps (eg the General Social Survey and a family survey)
- exploiting other sources of data such as administrative databases
- improving analytical capability, dissemination of information and access to data.

The programme will produce comprehensive and cohesive statistics on social well-being and social outcomes, to provide a sound basis for assessing progress towards achieving widely held social goals. Other surveys being considered for development as part of the programme include family, time use, and Māori social surveys.

Underpinning the GSS is the concept of social well-being. Social well-being lies at the heart of the social policy agenda of government. It relates to the satisfaction of social goals that are widely held in society and that reflect fundamental concerns about what constitutes a 'good life' (eg being healthy and having an adequate income).

This paper represents Statistics New Zealand's initial views on content for the General Social Survey (GSS) and provides an opportunity for potential users to provide comment on the proposed content and output. It begins by setting a timetable for the consultation process, then outlines the objectives of the GSS and the principles to be used in selecting survey content. This is followed by discussion and presentation of proposed topics for inclusion in the survey. The paper concludes with an outline of the main expected outputs from the survey. A template for making a submission on the content is available on the Statistics New Zealand website at www.stats.govt.nz.

2. Consultation Process

The aim of the consultation is to assess what users want to achieve from the GSS in order to evaluate how the survey might best fulfil these needs. Content is expected to be finalised by early 2006, with the questionnaire development beginning soon after.

Consultation timetable:

Tasks	Start	Finish
Survey information needs consultation phase		
User consultation: Preliminary views and submission form available on the Statistics New Zealand website. Submissions due by 30 September 2005.	1/9/05	30/9/05
Analysis and prioritisation of content by Statistics New Zealand.	3/10/05	30/11/05
Final content document available on the Statistics New Zealand website.		30/11/05

Guidelines on the Statistical New Zealand website will help users make a submission on the content. Submissions can be made by completing the form online at www.stats.govt.nz. All submissions should be completed and returned to Statistics New Zealand by **30 September 2005** in order to receive full consideration. All topics considered for inclusion in the survey will be evaluated against set criteria for determining content. Statistics New Zealand will decide the final content in consultation with the Programme of Official Social Statistics Advisory Committee on Surveys and Databases.

3. Overview of the General Social Survey

The concept of social well-being underpins the GSS. There is general consensus within government and the wider community on the areas of life that are important to social well-being. These are referred to as 'domains' in this paper, and encompass: population, housing, safety and security, economic standard of living, knowledge and skills, health, paid work, culture and identity, social connectedness, human rights, physical environment, and leisure and recreation.

The key objectives of the GSS are:

- to provide timely data on a range of social domains at the same time for the same individuals
- to enable analysis of the interrelationship of outcomes across domains, including the exploration of multiple disadvantage
- to provide a base for measuring changes in social outcomes over time and across population groups, using both self-assessed and objective measures
- to provide data on social well-being that is not available from other sources.

The GSS is also expected to provide enough information to be able to compare the circumstances of a range of population groups. Although it is a national survey, there is also interest in measuring and monitoring differences in well-being between regions, and between Auckland and the rest of New Zealand. It may be possible to produce data for five or six regions, but this will need to be investigated.

Features of the GSS include:

- social well-being as the core concept
- a two-yearly survey, the first to be conducted in 2007/2008
- interviews of up to an average of 45 minutes for each respondent (the mode has not yet been decided on)
- computer-assisted interviewing
- coverage of private dwellings only
- a sample of approximately 8,000 respondents (to be finalised)
- the flexibility to allocate space for an add-on module(s). The module(s) will either collect more detail about a particular domain, or information about an emerging area of interest related to the underlying concept of social well-being. Note that there will not be an add-on module in the first survey.

4. Criteria for determining GSS content

A considerable portion of the GSS content is expected to have been included in other official social surveys, because these surveys already include key indicators in specific domains. An important benefit of the GSS will be providing information across multiple domains in the same survey, allowing users to draw connections across different areas of peoples' lives (eg between health and housing).

There is also an identified need to collect information to 'fill the gaps', and produce outputs that are not currently available from other surveys. For example, initial consultation has identified a need for information on attitudes and values to help understand people's behaviour. While such measures can be difficult to interpret, they may be related to data on actual behaviours and outcomes in different areas. They can also be monitored over time, and, in theory, can show whether the nation believes living conditions are getting better or worse.

Because there are limits on both the number of topics that can be covered by the GSS and the amount of detail sought on any topic, a set of guidelines is essential for evaluating the suitability of topics for inclusion. Alongside the key objectives listed under 'Overview of the GSS', are a set of principles to guide the selection of topics. These principles have been endorsed by the Advisory Group on Surveys and Databases, which acts as a steering group for new surveys that will contribute to the Programme of Official Social Statistics.

The guiding principles to be used in determining measures to be included in the GSS are:

- the extent to which the measure reflects the phenomena it is intended to measure
- statistical robustness
- grounded in theory and standard practice
- able to be related to measures used in other domains
- is consistent with measures used in other New Zealand surveys, and, where possible, is consistent with international practice.

5. Proposed topics

The following topics are for discussion. The intention is to collect broad information across a number of social domains rather than more detailed information, which can be collected in subject specific surveys. If the topics listed below receive adequate support from users during consultation they will, where possible, be included in the GSS. It is also possible that topics not listed will be included if there is widespread support for their inclusion.

It is likely that some form of prioritisation will be required if it is apparent that the questionnaire will take longer than 45 minutes per respondent, on average, to administer. As part of the consultation process, users will be asked to prioritise topics within each domain. Content that requires significant development may be held over.

5.1 Domain: Population

The population domain is included in order to allow identification of population groups. Key social groups of policy interest can be defined in a variety of ways including by age, sex, ethnicity, and family status. Groups of policy interest for which analysis may be possible include youth, older persons, and low income recipients.

Other groups of emerging interest are those defined on the basis of their sexual orientation and disability status. The extent to which the survey is able to produce usable information on sexual orientation will need to be investigated.

The demand for information on people with disabilities will be satisfied by the 2006 Disability Survey, and therefore is not critical for inclusion in the first GSS. In future, it is hoped to be able to include the disability questions that are being developed by the Washington Disability Group for use in censuses and social surveys.

There is also interest in measuring and monitoring differences in well-being between regions, and between Auckland and the rest of New Zealand. The possible level of disaggregation will need to be investigated.

Proposed topics:

- age
- sex
- ethnicity
- social marital status
- family type
- household type
- number and age of children
- number of dependent children not living in household
- country of birth/year of arrival
- region.

Other possible topics:

- sexual orientation.

5.2 Domain: Housing

Affordable housing is an important factor in the well-being of individuals and families. Low quality housing and overcrowding can be detrimental to physical and mental health and to family life. Tenure and housing costs, in conjunction with income data can be used to provide an indication of housing affordability. If there is interest, it may be possible to collect information on number of moves in the last two years (or some other timeframe) and reasons for moving.

Proposed topics:

- tenure
- housing costs (ie mortgage/rent)
- number of bedrooms
- satisfaction with quality of housing (eg dampness, heating, condition of exterior, noise etc).

Other possible topics:

- number of moves in the last two years
- reasons for moving.

5.3 Domain: Safety and security

Crime has the potential to affect all aspects of life. Crime may restrict people's choices about how to live their lives. For example, they may avoid certain places or areas because of a perceived threat to personal security. Crime can affect health, employment outcomes, feelings of social connectedness and overall social well-being.

The extent to which individuals are free from threat to themselves or their property has two aspects: freedom from fear of crime (ie feelings of safety), and freedom from the risk of actually having crimes committed against them. The proposed topics listed below do not include victimisation by people known to the respondent. This survey is not seen as appropriate for measuring domestic violence.

Proposed topics:

- feelings of safety (eg in own home during day/after dark)
- fear of walking alone after dark
- victim of property crime in last 12 months
- victim of force/violence or threat of force/violence by stranger in last 12 months.

5.4 Domain: Economic standard of living

This domain includes information not only on income, but also financial stress and access to financial resources. Economic factors have implications which relate to all areas of social concern.

Proposed topics:

- personal income and sources
- whether total income (including partners) is enough to meet everyday needs
- savings habits (eg saving/paying off debt vs using up savings, borrowing more)
- difficulty paying bills in last 12 months (eg difficulty paying power bill, phone bill, mortgage/rent, school fees, car registration, essential food items etc)
- quick access to \$2,000 in times of financial stress
- household income
- rating of material standard of living compared with other people
- satisfaction with material standard of living.

Other possible topics:

- current personal financial situation compared with 12 months ago.

5.5 Domain: Knowledge and skills

Possession of knowledge and skills can be integral to a person's sense of self-worth. Knowledge and skills relate directly to employment decisions and career choice. Educational attainment is particularly relevant to socioeconomic status and affects not only a person's economic standard of living, but also their ability to make choices about other aspects of their lives.

Proposed topics:

- highest qualification
- current enrolment in formal education and training
- satisfaction with own education
- attitudes to education and learning.

5.6 Domain: Health

Good health is highly valued and is widely considered to be a prerequisite to the full enjoyment of other aspects of life. A range of factors affect health outcomes, including demographic, social, economic and environmental determinants. Health status measures, risk factors, and preventative health are of interest, particularly when analysed in conjunction with other items collected in the GSS such as socioeconomic status.

Proposed topics:

- self-assessed health status
- long-term health problems
- access to/satisfaction with health services.

Other possible topics:

- smoking
- alcohol consumption
- exercise.

5.7 Domain: Paid work

The standard items collected for employment will be important indicators of advantage/disadvantage when analysed in conjunction with topics in other domains, such as economic standard of living, health, and leisure and recreation. Some measure of job satisfaction, and at a broader level, satisfaction with work/life balance is also relevant.

Those who experience unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment or recurrent unemployment can be isolated from society and their community and lose self-confidence. If there is an identified need, the GSS will collect duration of unemployment as well as a measure of underemployment (ie those people in paid employment who would prefer to work more hours).

Proposed topics:

- labour force status
- main occupation
- main industry
- hours of work (eg total number of hours, 'unsociable' hours, full-time/part-time status)
- job satisfaction
- perception of job prospects if unemployed
- work/life balance.

Other possible topics:

- preference to work more/less hours
- duration of unemployment if not working.

5.8 Domain: Culture and identity

There is an identified need for more detailed information about how people living in New Zealand identify themselves, the interconnection between different cultural groups, and strength of 'belonging' in New Zealand. Culture encompasses the customs, practices, language and beliefs that define a particular social group. Identifying with a particular cultural group provides a sense of inclusion, and facilitates access to social networks with shared values and aspirations. A sense of belonging is important for a person's sense of self-worth and how they relate to others, and thus contributes to overall well-being.

Proposed topics:

- language retention
- strength of belonging in New Zealand
- values/attitudes towards Māori culture (eg Treaty obligations, maintenance of language etc)
- values/attitudes towards other cultural groups in New Zealand
- attendance and frequency of attendance at cultural events (eg libraries, galleries, museums, musical performance etc).

5.9 Domain: Social connectedness

Social connectedness refers to the relationships people have with others. Social connectedness is an integral part of social well-being, as relationships with others give people support, happiness, contentment and a sense of belonging. Positive contact with family and friends can provide the support a person may require in times of stress, facilitate their support of others, and enhance a person's sense of self-worth.

There is a broad lack of information about the ways in which individuals and families are connected to wider social networks, and the contribution of social participation to well-being and positive social outcomes. Incorporating questions about contact both with family, friends and more widely across the community will help fill this information gap. The GSS will facilitate investigation into any measurable effects from high levels of social connectedness on education, health and employment outcomes.

Proposed topics:

- contact with family (outside of immediate household), friends, neighbours
- type of contact (ie face to face, phone, email etc)
- availability of help in time of crisis
- ability to ask family/friends for small favours
- satisfaction with amount of contact with others
- membership of group (eg church, community, political, internet chat groups, sports groups, cultural groups etc) and attendance/level of activity
- access to motor vehicle
- feelings of isolation, trust, sense of community
- formal voluntary work (ie work done for organisations), type of organisation, hours.

Other possible topics:

- informal voluntary work done outside of own household (ie not through an organisation, who for, hours).

5.10 Domain: Human rights

Human rights deal with how people relate to one another. They are about how we live together and our responsibilities to each other. Human rights underlie our expectations about life, education, health, work, our personal security, equal opportunity and fair treatment, and our systems of government.

There are currently no established measures for this domain, thus the topics for consideration listed below must be viewed as experimental. Analysis of data collected in the GSS by sub-groups (eg by ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status) will also help identify differences relevant to the rights of those individuals.

Proposed topics:

- attitudinal/values and satisfaction questions about a range of human rights issues in New Zealand, such as civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and race relations (eg perceived corruption/lack of corruption, political decision making etc).

5.11 Domain: Physical environment

The physical environment includes both the 'built' environment and the natural environment in which people live. A healthy environment, and the desire to maintain this environment is important for people's physical and emotional well-being. Current information gaps that have been identified include perceptions and attitudes about the environment, and decisions and behaviours which affect the environment. The GSS will allow links between environmental data and other outcomes to be explored.

Proposed topics:

- local access to public services and facilities (eg school, public transport, shops, library, health centre, park, open space, recreation facilities etc)
- satisfaction with public services and facilities
- recycling, energy efficiency in own home
- attitudes/awareness of sustainability (eg recycling, energy efficiency, importance of New Zealand's clean, green image etc).

5.12 Domain: Leisure and recreation

Participation in leisure and recreation can contribute to an individual's social well-being in a variety of ways. Leisure time gives a person 'time out' from work and other commitments, and plays an important part in improving both mental and physical health. It can provide new stimulus, and has wide social benefits, creating opportunities for new friendships and networks to be formed. Information collected about leisure and recreation, combined with other data in the GSS will provide further information on work life balance, social connectedness and overall social well-being.

Proposed topics:

- amount of leisure time
- satisfaction with amount of leisure time
- type of leisure activities
- barriers to leisure/recreation activities.

6. Output

It is currently intended that the first release of information from the GSS will be in 2008. Results from the GSS will be available in the form of an initial release containing basic results issued by Statistics New Zealand. It is intended that a Confidentialised Unit Record File (CURF) as well as special data services (eg special tabulations) will follow at a later date and be available to interested researchers.

One of the key objectives of the GSS is to enable the analysis of the interrelationship of outcomes across domains, including the exploration of multiple disadvantage. This gives the survey a different focus from other Statistics New Zealand surveys, where the output is generally related to one or two domains. Researchers using the CURF will have their own plans for analysis, however advice is sought as to how Statistics New Zealand can best meet broader needs in presenting connections uncovered by the GSS.