

What Makes for Satisfied and Dissatisfied South Africans: Results from the General Household Survey in international comparison

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Abstract

Who are the satisfied South Africans ten years into democracy? How do material factors contribute to their life satisfaction? These are the questions addressed in this paper. Earlier South African research has consistently found a close positive relationship between life satisfaction and material standards of living in the apartheid and post-apartheid era. Recently, a new source of information has become available to shed further light on the association between material and subjective well-being. In 2002, Statistics South Africa, the country's official source of statistical information, agreed to ask South Africans participating in the General Household Survey whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with life. The 2002 General Household Survey (n26'000) used a measure developed for the Euromodule that allows for international comparison. The wide-ranging information contained in South Africa's official household survey offers a unique opportunity to explore what makes for satisfied and dissatisfied South Africans in relation to their material living standards. Results indicate that the improved living standards afforded to many black South Africans under democracy are associated with increases in life satisfaction. Furthermore, habituation does not appear to have diluted the positive relationship between living standards and well-being. However, political factors continue to play an important role in shaping subjective well-being. In conclusion, it is argued that material gains might also have restored the pride and dignity denied to black South Africans in the past.

Background

The politics of living standards should not be overlooked when studying quality of life in transition countries. Transition countries can be divided into two broad groups: societies that experienced material gains in advance of the introduction of democracy and societies that were catapulted from a closed economy into liberal democracy overnight. The 'Asian tiger' countries whose benign dictatorships secured rapid economic development are examples of the former. South Africa and the former Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe belong to the latter group. In the case of the Asian tigers, the social contract between government and the people promised rapid economic development but allowed the people very little voice. Democratic stirrings have surfaced only in more recent times now that higher standards of

living have been achieved. In the second case, linked historical events changed the lives of millions overnight. The fall of the wall between West and East Germany in late 1989 and the release from prison of Nelson Mandela in South Africa in early 1990 brought instant political liberation before economic reform.

The focus of this paper is on the life satisfaction of black South Africans who were enfranchised in 1994 but whose economic liberation has been delayed for historical reasons. As is demonstrated later in the paper, basic needs are still unfulfilled for substantial proportions of the black majority that make up approximately 78% in a total population of some 46 million South Africans. Nevertheless, for the first time since colonial rule, South Africa has created a substantial black middle class. Until recently, it would have been difficult to test various constellations of life satisfaction and material circumstances simply because there were too few better-off black subjects to be found in national surveys (Møller, 2000)!

The rationale for engaging in quality-of-life studies is precisely that happiness does not necessarily depend on ideal living circumstances. One of the most striking findings to emerge from the South African Quality of Life Trends study¹, which commenced in the early 1980s, was that life satisfaction perfectly mirrored the life opportunities afforded by apartheid society (Møller and Schlemmer, 1983; 1989; Møller 1989; 1998; 1999). On both subjective indicators of well-being and objective indicators of material quality of life the oppressed black majority consistently scored lowest. The ruling white minority scored highest, with Indian/Asian and coloured South Africans falling in between. The hierarchical order of the scores mimicked the unequal opportunities in apartheid society. With a notable exception, this pattern was also observed in the democratic era. The project captured the peak moment of flow in South African society in 1994. Miraculously, following the first democratic elections black satisfaction soared (Møller, 1994). However, this moment faded rapidly and later rounds of surveys found that the hierarchical order of life satisfaction as a mirror of objective living standards had reappeared. The explanation close at hand was that democracy had met the political but not the material aspirations of the newly enfranchised black majority (Møller, 2001).

Hypotheses

The depressed quality of life during the South African transition to democracy is subject to a range of interpretations. The analysis in this paper is guided by contrasting explanations:

As noted earlier, the South African Quality of Life trends project has consistently found a strong match between life satisfaction and material circumstances. Assuming that life

satisfaction increases with rising living standards, the most plausible explanation for low levels of life satisfaction among black South Africans is simply that living standards have not risen or are perceived not to have risen sufficiently. One of the ruling African National Congress's main tasks has been to address the backlog in development of the black, coloured and Indian sectors of the population that were oppressed under the former political regime. Election promises in 1994 focused on creating a 'better life for all'. The promises were repeated in the run-up to the second and third national elections of 1999 and 2004 in which the African National Congress consolidated its majority rule. The new government has been successful in achieving economic stability and modest growth. It has also made impressive strides in improving infrastructure and delivering services to the poor as set out in the government's ten-year review. However, much remains to be done. Persisting poverty and inequality and jobless growth represent major challenges. Some 40.5% of the economically active are unemployed according to the extended definition that includes discouraged workseekers who have given up looking for jobs (SAIRR, 2005). Moreover, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has infected an estimated 5 million in a population of over 46 million, threatens to undo the development gains achieved to date (SAIRR, 2005). For these reasons, the backlog in development may still be the most important determinant of depressed life satisfaction among the majority of black South Africans. Poverty is concentrated mainly in the rural areas, particularly in the former ethnic 'homelands' created under apartheid. Black urbanisation, which was formerly kept in check by harsh laws prohibiting geographical mobility and settlement in cities, has increased dramatically in the past decade. Shack settlements on the periphery of urban centres populated by jobseekers have mushroomed while job opportunities have not kept pace with demand (Ndegwa et al., 2004, and this issue). Unsurprisingly, opinion polls identify poverty and inequality as the key challenges facing South Africa in the new era. These economic issues have displaced the earlier obsession with race relations that dominated in the apartheid era (Schlemmer, 2001).

However, the theoretical possibility of people being satisfied in spite of poor living circumstances cannot be discounted (see Biswas-Diener and Diener, 2001). Hypothetically, South Africans might be satisfied regardless of lack of material gains under democracy. Patience might be the deciding factor here. A number of scholars have observed that patience is an African attribute (e.g., Sparks, 1990). In South Africa under colonial and apartheid rule, patience was a virtue borne of necessity for the oppressed awaiting political liberation. Noteworthy is that South Africans were asked to remain patient in the first years of transition while the new government put its house in order. The targets set out in the African National Congress's ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme had to be put on hold when the new government discovered that it had not inherited sufficient funds to carry out its

development plans. Priorities switched to achieving macroeconomic stability. An appeal for patience was a recurrent message in presidential addresses to the people. Earlier qualitative research evidence suggests that a large proportion of the poor heeded this advice and accepted that the government could not 'do everything at once' (e.g., Charney, 1995). Theoretically, patience or deferred gratification, a carry-over from the earlier era, may dictate the appreciation of life, particularly among the older black generation.

Two further factors, rising expectations and shifting reference standards, may mediate the low life satisfaction of the black population in the democratic era.

Regarding *rising expectations*, one might suppose that aspirations for a better material life have remained unfulfilled since 1994 for the vast majority. In time, political rights without the material underpinnings of democracy have begun to ring hollow. Patience has worn thin as is evident by the emergence of new social movements protesting slow service delivery among other grievances (Ballard, 2005).

Shifting *comparative reference standards* may also play a decisive role in mediating life satisfaction. In South Africa's new open society, the formerly disenfranchised have been increasingly exposed to the lifestyles of people in richer countries in the media. It is likely that upward global comparisons, which were discouraged in the former era, will be more commonplace in the new era, especially among the younger generations who have no personal experience of apartheid. While patience borne of necessity may have been a virtue under colonial and apartheid rule, the younger post-apartheid generations are conspicuously impatient to reap the material rewards of South Africa's democracy. Their consumer aspirations have been coded as the 'four C's': cell phones, cars, clothes and cash. The reference standards of the youth are informed by the soap operas they watch on television. They wish to adopt the international youth lifestyle enjoyed by young people living in richer countries. Their blatantly immodest demands are fuelled by peer pressure and by a sense of urgency and uncertainty in a time of HIV/AIDS. Young people want to live life to the fullest before time runs out.

Local reference standards may also be important in influencing life satisfaction. The new black economic elite is conspicuous. It attracts invidious comparison in that it is often accused of forgetting its poorer country cousins and the jobless shack dwellers who eke out an existence on the urban periphery (Terreblanche, 2002). In line with the hypothesis of rising expectations and feelings of relative deprivation, black South Africans who make upward comparisons with people in richer societies or with the new economic elites in their own

country may be disappointed in spite of having achieved modest or substantial material gains in the new era.

Research objectives

This paper examines the relationship between life satisfaction and living conditions among black South Africans who make up the majority of approximately 78% of the total population and whose material needs were neglected in the past. As mentioned earlier, until recently it would have been impossible to test different interpretations of the relationship between material and subjective well-being because of insufficient numbers. The General Household Survey, based on a large sample, offers information on households coming from a broad range of material circumstances. It provides a good starting point for exploring why many black South Africans continue to be dissatisfied with life under the new political dispensation.

Data sources

The analysis of life satisfaction in the General Household Survey was informed by the South African Quality of Life Trends Study, described above (see also end note 1), that has tracked life satisfaction, happiness and optimism for over two decades. The trends project has relied on the inclusion of well-being items in nationally representative sample surveys of some 2 200 respondents to establish trends in life and domain satisfactions, happiness and optimism. As mentioned earlier, the project has observed a strong relationship between living standards and personal well-being in successive surveys. To add depth to interpretations of trends in subjective well-being, the project has also studied the significance of intangibles, such as feelings of national pride (Møller, Dickow and Harris, 1999; Dickow and Møller, 2002). The latest round of research that focused on democracy found that the new black economic elite scored significantly higher on subjective well-being than the rank-and-file and also exhibited democratic ideals to a greater degree (Møller, 2004)².

Results from Statistics South Africa's 2002 General Household Survey, made available to the public in 2004, provide a new data source to shed light on the significance of social mobility among the formerly disadvantaged. Statistics South Africa's household survey and its predecessors, with sample sizes of between 16'000 and 30'000, have been designed to capture progress in delivering goods and services to South Africans since 1994, and to monitor the backlog in development among the formerly disadvantaged sectors of the population. The survey elicits mainly factual information supplied by a responsible adult in the household, in most instances the household head, in a personal interview situation. The survey asks householders to self-identify race, using the nomenclature adopted under apartheid, in order to monitor changes in living standards among the formerly disadvantaged sector of the

population. Once-off additions to the 2002 General Household Survey include select items from the Euromodule that allow for international comparisons of objective and subjective indicators of welfare, public safety and anomia. The Euromodule³ builds on the European tradition of quality-of-life studies that balances objective measures of living circumstances with subjective assessments to give a rounded picture of the impact of welfare policies on the lives of citizens (Delhey, et al., 2002).

The 2002 General Household Survey was conducted among 26'000 households throughout the country using a multi-stage stratified sample design. Householders were interviewed in their home language or their language of choice by trained fieldworkers. The data is weighted to population size. The analysis for this paper is based on weighted data.

Method

Satisfaction with life-as-a-whole is one of the most widely-used measures of subjective well-being internationally. The life satisfaction of respondents was measured with the Euromodule item that read: 'Please tell me how satisfied you are with your life in general?' Responses were recorded on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 to 10 with the endpoints labelled 'completely satisfied' and 'completely dissatisfied'. The scale was presented on a prompt card as an arrow in vertical position. The life satisfaction item, the key variable under study here, along with the other Euromodule items relating to satisfaction with physical safety and anomia, were placed in the last section of the interview. For purposes of the analysis, the person in the household who responded to the item on life satisfaction and the other Euromodule items was identified as the respondent. Personal information on this respondent was linked to household information collected in other sections of the interview.

The majority of respondents were female (60%), heads of households (62%) or their spouses/partners (17%) and main breadwinners (61%) in the household. Roughly equal proportions of respondents were aged less than 35 years (45%) and between the ages of 35 to 59 years (43%); were married (44%) and single (41%), and were located in the urban (51%) and the rural areas (49%).

Analysis

Some 140 indicators in the 2002 General Household Survey questionnaire were identified as possible predictors of life satisfaction. The selected indicators covered a wide range of factors thought to influence well-being. Factual information on the household included geographical location, housing, infrastructure and access to services, household assets and consumer items, and income and expenditure. Householders also reported on incidence of hunger,

victimisation and social problems in the household. They rated satisfaction with education, health, and welfare services and aspects of public safety. Background information on the respondent included ethnicity, race, age, gender, marital status, relation to household head, employment, occupation, literacy and level of formal education, school attendance, reasons for not working in a job or continuing one's education, disability, illness and injury, and use of health and welfare services. The indicators were first broken down by race to examine the black backlog in development relative to other race groups. The data pertaining to the black subsample was then isolated for further analysis.

Life satisfaction was regrouped into three response categories of the 'satisfied' scoring above the mid-point, those scoring on the mid-point, and the 'dissatisfied' scoring below the mid-point. The recoded life satisfaction measure was cross-tabulated with the entire set of predictors. Profiles based on the predictors were prepared for those scoring above and below the mid-point of the life satisfaction scale. The last round of analysis selected predictors that discriminated well in the bivariate analysis for inclusion in exploratory multivariate regression analysis.

Results

Comparative life satisfaction

Table 1 gives the distribution of life satisfaction for the total sample and the four race groups. A slight majority of black householders was satisfied compared to some 58% in the total sample. Black satisfaction is significantly lower than that of other race groups.

Table 1 about here

Adopting the Euromodule's measure of life satisfaction allows for international comparisons. In Table 2 the life satisfaction scores for South Africans range from the highest to the lowest of the Euromodule countries. Black South Africans rank at the bottom of the list somewhat above Turkey whose future membership in the European Union was a heated topic of debate at the time of writing. White South Africans rank close to the top of the list alongside reunited Germany. Coloured and Indian South Africans score in between, below Slovenia and East Germany and ahead of Hungary.

Table 2 about here

The Euromodule measure of life satisfaction is more finely calibrated than the one developed for use in the South African Quality of Life Trends project. The latter project, described earlier, uses the conventional five-point scale ranging from ‘very satisfied’ to ‘very dissatisfied’ with an ambiguous (‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’) mid-point. Figure 1 shows that the Euromodule measure produced higher percentages of satisfied South Africans than the conventional measure. In 2002, 52% of blacks scored above the mid-point on the 11-point Euromodule life-satisfaction measure applied in Statistics South Africa’s General Household Survey compared to 37% on the five-point measure used by the South African Quality of Life Trends project⁴. The ‘racial hierarchy’ of life satisfaction was also more pronounced in the latter study. Importantly, the broad picture remains the same in both surveys. Blacks scored significantly lower than other South Africans on satisfaction with life-as-a-whole.

Figure 1 about here

Indicators of inequality

Table 3 show differences in living conditions by race. It presents a selection of 28 objective indicators of living standards from the General Household Survey broken down by race. Results in Table 3 highlight the challenges facing the new government charged with reducing the backlog in social services inherited from the former era. The backlog is greatest among black householders followed at a distance by the backlog for coloured householders. For example, only a quarter of black householders have access to piped water in the home and only one-fifth have a flush toilet. Only 13% have a good roof over their heads. Approximately, one-fifth lives in a shack and collects firewood for cooking. About one in six carry water for household use. In the case of each indicator, the progression goes from lowest living standard for black householders over coloured and Indian householders to highest standard of living for white householders. If the values of negative indicators are subtracted from values of positive indicators, as shown at the bottom of the table, the ‘average net positive’ values form a racial hierarchy. The average progression of living standards is shown graphically in Figure 2. The indicators of objective living standards conform to the racial hierarchy consistently observed in surveys conducted for the South African Quality of Life Trends project.

Figure 2 about here

Profiles of satisfied and dissatisfied South Africans

Some 52% of black South Africans were satisfied with life in the 2002 General Household Survey compared to 36% dissatisfied. What are the most distinctive characteristics of

householders that report satisfaction and dissatisfaction? Tables 4 and 5 present select results based on correlations between life satisfaction and the full set of predictors⁵. The indicators that discriminated best between satisfied and dissatisfied black householders have been reproduced in Tables 4 and 5. Table 4 profiles the above-average *satisfied* householders; Table 5 the above-average *dissatisfied* householders.

Table 4 about here

The satisfied. The list of satisfiers in Table 4 is fairly short and concise. Householders that enjoy a higher standard of living are generally more satisfied. Solid and spacious formal housing, an intact roof over one's head, amenities in the home such as an uninterrupted piped water supply, electricity, a flush toilet and services including telecommunications and mail delivery make a difference. Assets and possessions ranging from a clock to a vehicle are important. Rural assets ranging from cattle and sheep to poultry also contribute to subjective well-being. The households of satisfied respondents earn more and spend more than others. They can rely on regular sources of income from wage earners or in few instances on a basket of social grants. Household members never go hungry.

The matching respondent profile indicates a generally satisfied and optimistic respondent. Satisfaction is somewhat more evident among married and older householders. The satisfied tend to be better educated, to be employed as wage earners who earn higher salaries, and to be medically insured. Respondents who score higher on life satisfaction are more likely to express satisfaction with health and welfare services used in the past month. They are more optimistic about the future.

Table 5 about here

What are the characteristics of *dissatisfied householders*? It is clear from Table 5 that dissatisfied householders live in less favourable circumstances and enjoy lower levels of living than others. Dissatisfaction is above-average among shack dwellers, householders that share piped water with others, and who report unsafe drinking water. Dissatisfied households have to make do with inferior sanitation and mail delivery or none at all. Dissatisfied householders who have access to services are more likely to experience hassles with service delivery. Piped water is an example. The dissatisfied are more likely than others to have to cope with daily interruptions of their piped water supply and longer delays in restoring supply. Their water might be cut off due to non-payment. Mainly rural and shack dwellers who have access to less efficient sources of energy are among the dissatisfied. These include

householders who spent time in the past week collecting water or firewood for domestic use and householders who use paraffin or wood for cooking and candles for lighting. Low household income allows for few possessions and assets. Dissatisfied householders may have to rely on remittances sent to them by members working elsewhere or on other irregular sources of income. Dissatisfied householders are more likely to rely on social grants such as a child grant or a disability grant. Dissatisfied householders appear to be particularly vulnerable. They and members of their households are more likely than others to have experience of misfortune including crime, violence and illness.

The dissatisfied also find themselves in less than fortunate personal circumstances. A minority is divorced. Dissatisfaction is associated with illiteracy and lower levels of educational achievement. Over one in four among the dissatisfied has less than a primary school education. Many are discouraged from continuing their education due to financial constraints among others. Those who are continuing their education cite various problems with schooling. The rate of unemployment among the dissatisfied is above average according to both the official definition and the extended definition that includes discouraged workseekers. The dissatisfied are more likely to have a disability that poses limitations on daily activities or to have experienced injury or illness in the past month. Persons reporting diabetes, trauma, tuberculosis, a sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS are over-represented among the dissatisfied. The dissatisfied report problems and dissatisfaction with health and welfare services and with public safety. Long waiting times, unavailability of drugs and uncaring personnel are some of the problems experienced with health services. The dissatisfied are more concerned than others about their own personal safety and that of household members. They score higher on aspects of anomia: they admit that they suffer from loneliness, do not enjoy work, and feel life is overcomplicated (see also Huschka and Mau, in press). The majority is pessimistic about the future.

Discussion. The new government's efforts to increase levels of services to the formerly disadvantaged and the poor appear to have paid off. Higher levels of services and efficient delivery appear to contribute to citizen satisfaction. Higher income and expenditure appears to be the key to satisfaction in many cases. Although numbers are small, social grants provide a stopgap solution for the poor. The smaller grants, including the child grant, which paid R150 in 2002, are associated with dissatisfaction. In the case of the higher-paying disability grant, the disability rather than the income from the grant may be the source of dissatisfaction. Some surprising results call for comment. The satisfaction associated with living without one's spouse or partner is a case in point. Given that the majority of respondents are women, it is possible that living without one's spouse or partner in the household may indicate that one's

husband is employed in another centre, which may have positive returns for household welfare. Alternatively, given the high incidence of abuse of women in South Africa, some women may feel safer living without fear of domestic violence. The few persons who chose to give their interview in English or Afrikaans rather than an African language might belong to the educated elite that is used to conducting business in a language other than its mother tongue. IsiZulu is the dominant language in KwaZulu-Natal, the province that contains the former 'homeland' of the Zulus. Zulus are the main supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party that has increasingly lost power to the ruling African National Congress since 1994. The high levels of dissatisfaction among Zulu speakers and residents of KwaZulu-Natal province may stem from political alienation as well as from relative material deprivation. Dissatisfaction among the Zulus in the democratic era is evident in other quantitative and qualitative surveys conducted by the author among the general public (Møller, 2000) and among the youth (Leggett et al., 1997).

Non-discriminating indicators

So far the discussion has focused on factors that distinguish the satisfied from the dissatisfied among black South Africans that make up the majority of the population – 78% in 2002. It may also be important to highlight the factors among the 140 indicators reviewed that did not show up any differences when cross-tabulated with life satisfaction.

The General Household Survey compiled a list of ten household possessions including transport and traction. With one exception, ownership of any of these possessions is associated with higher life satisfaction. However, a bed of one's own appears to be so commonplace that it is not associated with higher life satisfaction. Virtually all households, including 96% of black households, report that they sleep in their own bed.

Noteworthy is that the life satisfaction of social pensioners⁶, who make up just under a fifth of the black householders, is close to average. The fact that the social pension is a widespread and acceptable source of income for low-income households may explain why it attracts average levels of satisfaction. Householders who report pensions and grants as the main source of household income rank second in life satisfaction right behind salary earners who typically command the highest respect among income earners. Respondents whose households benefit from three or more social grants achieve above-average life satisfaction. Taken together these results suggest that some householders dependent on government transfers are included in mainstream society. Average or above-average satisfaction may be due to the fact that the grants bring them financially on par with better-off households. This interpretation is in line with conclusions drawn in recent studies of the poverty-alleviation

role of the social pension (Møller and Ferreira, 2003). Research on pensioner households found that the grant lifts low-income households out of dire poverty, reduces vulnerability, and gives dignity to the pensioner breadwinners.

Home ownership and access to land are thought to be important factors in creating a middle class and satisfied citizenry. Some million and a half formal minimal-housing units have been built since 1994 under the new government's Reconstruction and Development Plan. In contrast, land restitution and distribution has proceeded at a slower pace than anticipated. Land ownership threatens to become a contentious social issue in future. Contrary to expectations, homeowners in the 2002 General Household Survey are not more satisfied with life than renters. In fact, the small minority of householders living rent-free (shown in the Table 4) appear to be more satisfied than others possibly due to the savings incurred. Although the vast majority of black South Africans are homeowners (70%), their standard of housing varies enormously ranging from a traditional hut or a shack on the urban periphery, to substantial suburban housing. Similarly, the link between access to land and life satisfaction is not clear in the results. Householders who own land and those who are beneficiaries of a government land grant are less satisfied with life than rural householders who have access to land held in trust by a tribal authority. Similarly, beneficiaries of the government's subsidy to first-time homeowners, an estimated 6% of householders, tend to be less satisfied than others. It is possible, as appears to be the case of welfare beneficiaries such as disability grantees, that the housing subsidy and the land grant may be associated with a lower standard of living that impacts negatively on life satisfaction.

Some 17% of respondents reported illness or injury in the past month. While the more life-threatening and serious illnesses are associated with dissatisfaction (see Table 5), sufferers of influenza, the most common illness that affected over four in ten, report approximately average life satisfaction. Interestingly, the less than 1% of sufferers who reported abuse of alcohol or drugs rated *above-average* life satisfaction. Among respondents who have a disability that limited daily activities in the past six months or longer, those who report a sight or hearing disability tend to be more satisfied with life than others.

Rural and urban variations in life satisfaction

The composite picture of satisfied and dissatisfied householders is a broad-brush generalisation. A finer analysis was undertaken to explore variations in life satisfaction by dividing the black subsample into four groups according to household income and rural/urban location. The cut-off for household expenditure, a proxy for income, was adjusted to allow for on average lower expenditure in the rural areas. Profiles of the satisfied and dissatisfied were

compared across the four groups. The rationale underlying the second round of analysis was the notion that rising expectations and lifestyles might assign different values to the indicators under consideration. Keeping up with the Mkizes might acquire different emphases in urban and rural areas. Rising expectations might devalue household amenities that are taken for granted in urban areas but not in remote rural areas which still await the rollout of electricity and sanitation. On the other hand, some rural households may set store by a lifestyle that respects the ancestors and traditional values rather than modern consumerism.

Results were revealing. Income and employment factors tended to satisfy throughout. Conversely, hunger appeared to depress well-being in all four groups. Problems with health services, concern with personal safety, and anomia were generally associated with lower levels of life satisfaction. However, some subtle differences were also detected. For example, a social pension does not appear to have an impact on life satisfaction among higher-income householders but tends to lift levels of satisfaction among lower-income ones. Electricity appears to satisfy more in the urban than the rural areas. Older sources of energy for cooking such as wood and paraffin are only weakly associated with dissatisfaction in rural areas. Similarly, the use of candles for lighting is only weakly associated with dissatisfaction among lower-income rural householders. A tentative explanation is that use of alternative fuels, even if less efficient than electricity, might afford savings for low-income and rural households. The weak association between life satisfaction and use of the bucket system for sanitation among low-income black householders might reflect lower expectations. Different types of mail delivery appeared to satisfy rural and urban needs. Owning a plough boosted life satisfaction among rural householders while books were mainly associated with higher life satisfaction among higher income urban householders. Interestingly, the minority of cattle owners scored above average on life satisfaction in all groups. This finding suggests that the traditional value assigned to cattle wealth still holds in black society in spite of rapid urbanisation.

Social mobility and life satisfaction

The new government has made major investments in bringing services such as housing, electricity and telecommunications to the poor and formerly disadvantaged. The preceding analysis established that formal housing, electricity, and telecommunications were associated with life satisfaction. The question is whether service delivery has brought longer-lasting life satisfaction. According to the theory of social adjustment (e.g., Easterlin, 2002), satisfaction levels remain static due to rising expectations. Although improvements may increase life satisfaction initially, once the novelty of new living conditions has worn off and habituation sets in, satisfaction returns to the personal set-level. Once people take their new life

circumstances for granted, rising aspirations may reduce the satisfaction derived from new goods and services.

The 2002 General Household Survey collected information on access to services over time that allows us to test this theory. Householders were asked about their access to housing, electricity and telecommunication services at the time of the survey and five years earlier. Comparison of the two time periods identified gains and losses in access to services for black householders over the five-year time period. (Newly formed households were categorised according to their access to services at the time of the survey.) It was expected that gains would be associated with life satisfaction and losses with dissatisfaction. However, results proved to be less than clear-cut. Firstly, little mobility was observed. Less than a quarter had experienced gains or losses for any of the three services with electricity gains being by far the most common. Many householders had enjoyed the same level of service at the time of the survey and five years earlier. This in itself is indicative of the state's good performance record. Some 57% were established in formal housing and 49% were established users of a mains electricity supply, while only 8% were established users of a landline telephone. In the case of housing, only some 5% had moved from shacks or traditional huts into a formal dwelling while less than 1% had moved from formal housing to a shack or traditional hut. Although numbers are small, satisfaction tended to be more pronounced for gains in housing while losses were more closely associated with dissatisfaction. Noteworthy is that the longer-term formally (57%) and traditionally housed (17%) were predominantly satisfied while the longer-term shack dwellers were predominantly dissatisfied.

The rollout of electricity is a South African success story. Just over a fifth of black householders had gained access to electricity during the five-year period (22%) while only 1% had lost their electricity connection. The majority of householders (49%) were established users whose homes had already been electrified five years earlier while only 28% were residents who had yet to gain access to electricity. The main divide in levels of satisfaction appears to be between the gainers and established users of electricity, on the one hand, versus the losers and those who had never had access to electricity, on the other.

Regarding telecommunications, some 13% of black householders reported access to a landline telephone in 2002, down 1% from five years earlier. Six percent of householders reported losing their landline over the five-year period. The established users of a landline telephone were more satisfied with life than former users who had lost their landline or those who had never gained access to telecommunications. Noteworthy is that some 24% of householders who did not have access to a landline telephone at the time of the survey had

access to a cellular phone. Cell-phone owners were significantly more satisfied with life than the majority of black householders who did not have access to a landline or a cellular phone.

Taken together, these observations suggest that access to services boosts life satisfaction. Conversely, loss of services is associated with depressed life satisfaction. Importantly, services appear to enhance life satisfaction over the longer term. There are few signs of habituation. Contrary to expectations, new users do not appear to be more satisfied than established users. In fact, established users appear to be as satisfied as or even more satisfied than new users. This suggests that access to services might have multiplier effects in improving quality of life.

Material versus subjective quality of life

A last analysis was applied to assess the relative importance of material factors in enhancing the life satisfaction of black householders. Exploratory regression analysis was applied to 7 batches of 65 dummy variables to assess their relative impact on life satisfaction. The batches covered demographics, income/livelihoods, living standards, mobility in living standards, assets, health and welfare, safety and security, and personal factors⁷. Demographics were entered along with one or more combinations of batches. Variables were entered simultaneously or stepwise yielding a total of 24 regression solutions.

Demographics together with income/livelihoods, living standards, mobility in living standards, or combinations of these batches of variables, accounted for some 10-11% of the variance in life satisfaction. Demographics combined with perceptions of safety and security accounted for some 17 % and demographics combined with perceptions of safety and personal disposition accounted for 20%. All 65 variables accounted for some 25%.

When all 65 variables were entered at one time or stepwise, the objective livelihoods and living standards variables tended to be displaced or 'crowded out' by subjective variables such as satisfaction with public safety, anomia, optimism and feeling safe or unsafe in the neighbourhood. This is to be expected. Earlier research has demonstrated that correlations with life satisfaction tend to be highest when a domain satisfaction is involved, especially when identical measurement scales are used, as was the case with the public safety variable borrowed from the Euromodule. Optimism and anomia are reflections of the core self and are expected to be more central to well-being than basic needs such as food and shelter.

Of importance for the discussion here is the relative importance of livelihoods and living standards variables compared to factors closer to the self. If livelihoods and living standards

can hold their own in competition with personal factors, they should be regarded as influential in enhancing subjective well-being. A number of variables passed this test.

In the livelihoods batch, factors such as 'not being unemployed' (according to the strict or extended definition), having 'higher household expenditure' and being a 'better-paid wage earner' consistently did the most work. In the living standards batch, basic needs were of paramount importance: 'adults never going hungry' was typically entered first. In addition, 'adults going hungry' with a negative sign featured prominently in almost all solutions. All-important were also a 'good roof' over one's head followed by 'no interruptions of piped water supply', 'use electricity for cooking', and a telephone or cellular phone. Conversely, living in a shack depressed satisfaction. Worth noting is that formal housing did not emerge as a strong variable. On the other hand, 'being housed formally at the time of the survey and five years earlier' was included in many of the regression models. However, the sign was negative, indicating that householders who had gained formal housing were more satisfied than others. Taken together, these results suggest that upward housing mobility might play a role in boosting life satisfaction.

Household assets and health issues were for the most part crowded out of regression solutions by livelihoods and living standards variables. Exceptionally, access to a medical aid, a health benefit enjoyed by only one in ten, emerged as a relatively strong predictor of life satisfaction. However, medical aid benefits, which are usually tied to wage employment, might be considered a proxy indicator of a better living standard rather than a health indicator.

Regarding demographics, being a Zulu speaker⁸ consistently depressed life satisfaction and was entered first or second in most solutions. Furthermore, being 60 years or older and to a lesser degree being 34 years or younger contributed positively to well-being suggesting that the 'sandwich' generation that shoulders the biggest burden of dependency, is most likely to be least contented.

Conclusions

Returning to the hypotheses posed at the outset, the life satisfaction of black South Africans seems to go hand in hand with living standards as indicated by access to income and a range of goods and services. Rising expectations appear to play a minimal role. Habituation appears not to have set in among better-off householders who still seem to be content with their material gains under democracy. As far as one can tell, reference standards might include comparison of one's earlier circumstances, one of the seven reference comparisons included in Michalos' (1985) multiple discrepancy theory. Housing is a case in point. Shack dwellers

are more dissatisfied than others whereas the negative sign attached to housing mobility in the regression analysis suggests that housing gains over time might be associated with increased life satisfaction. In line with findings of earlier studies of metropolitan quality of life (Møller, 2001b), it is the higher standards of services that satisfy most. For instance, an uninterrupted piped water supply crowded out access to safe water in the regression analysis. However, targets for providing fixed-line telecommunications may have to be reconsidered, as cellular phone substitutes appear to satisfy equally⁹. To a certain degree lifestyles in urban and rural areas appear to mediate life satisfaction but the importance of income and possessions seems to cut across the rural and urban divide.

A different, less superficial reading of the results might also be attempted. Unusually, Statistics South Africa's 2002 General Household Survey includes some indicators that go beyond factual information on access to goods and services. Satisfied black South Africans enjoy a higher standard of living but they also appear to be more confident in themselves and the future as indicated by the anomia items replicated from the Euromodule. They experience fewer slights and hassles in everyday life as evidenced in their assessments of services. Quality-of-life researchers have identified income as one of the most versatile resources that enables people to realise a wide range of ambitions beyond the material (Diener and Biswas-Diener; Cummins, 2000). Given South Africa's history, the symbolic significance attached to the material factors that enhance life quality may be all-important. For the formerly disadvantaged under apartheid, income and assets may mean more than a comfortable lifestyle. There can be no doubt that the first open elections restored the dignity and pride of new voters. Political liberation was achieved. However, expectations were raised that democracy would also bring material rewards to sustain new found feelings of freedom. Consider that possessions and the trappings of modernity have afforded badges of self-respect for black citizens in the democratic era. A regular source of income affords creditworthiness and social prestige as well as financial security and peace of mind. A well-appointed home tells the world that black South Africans are no longer second-class citizens in their own country. In short, the material privileges that satisfy also empower black householders and prove their personal worth in a global society that values consumerism.

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Notes

1. The South African Quality of Trends project, currently managed by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, is based on successive nationally representative cross-sectional surveys conducted by the same social research company, MarkData, to aid comparison over time (see Møller, 2005, for its history, rationale and an overview of trends). The study uses a conventional satisfaction with life-as-a-whole measure recorded on a five-point labelled scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied' over a neutral 'neither/nor' midpoint.

2. To extend the trendline of global indicators for 2002, the conventional life satisfaction measure used in the South African Quality of Life Trends project was applied in the context of a democracy study. The study was conducted in partnership with UNESCO's International Centre for Human Sciences, Byblos, Lebanon, through a nationwide representative MarkData survey (Møller, 2004).

3. The Euromodule was initially designed to compare welfare and quality of life in the old and new member countries of the European Union. The participation of outliers, South Africa's new democracy and the economically successful South Korean 'tiger', extends the range of countries in the Euromodule dataset beyond Europe.

4. Earlier Statistics South Africa household surveys used a five-point labelled household satisfaction score similar to the conventional life-satisfaction used in the South African Quality of Life Trends project. Results mirrored objective living conditions and highlighted racial inequalities in access to goods and services (see Devey and Møller, 2002; Møller and Devey, 2003).

5. Initially, results based on all household members were also reviewed. For simplicity sake, only the respondent values are presented here, as results for the respondent and all household co-residents were similar.

6. South Africa's social pension system was introduced in the first half of the 20th century and was a success story even under apartheid. Racial parity in pension payments was phased in

during the 1980s and achieved in 1993 before the ANC-led government came into power in 1994. Women over 60 years and men over 65 years are eligible for a social pension, which is means-tested. The social pension is considered a right rather than a privilege. It targets poor households and the take-up rate is exceptionally high (van der Berg, 1997).

7. Sixty-five variables were entered as dummies in the regression analysis in seven batches: demographics (11 variables), livelihoods (11), living standards (17), mobility in living standards over past five years (3), assets (7), health and welfare (7), safety and security issues (6), personal (3). The black subsample size was n19487 for individual and n19841 for household variables. *Demographics*: Urban (50% of black subsample); male (39%); 34 years or younger (43%); 60 years or older (13%); marital status (married 44%, widowed 11%, divorced 4%); co-resident spouse (31%); illiterate (18%); secondary or higher-level education (37%); isiZulu speaker (27%). *Livelihoods*: paid worker (27%); better paid worker, R1001 or more (18%); Unemployed according to strict (17%), extended definition (11%); no job skills (15%); main source of household income (salary 16%, remittances 21%, social grants 39%), lowest (39%) and highest (9%) household expenditure; 3 or more social grants in household (.3%). *Living standards*: Housing (formal 57%, informal/shack 18%); good roof condition (54%); 5 rooms or more (31%); safe drinking water (88%); piped water service with no interruptions in past year (45%); mains electricity (72%); use candles for lighting (22%); use electricity for cooking (44%); flush toilet (21%); weekly rubbish removal by local authority (44%); telephone/ cellular phone (34%); adults went hungry (9%)/children went hungry (6%)/adults never went hungry (61%) in past twelve months; fetches water (22%)/wood (16%). *Mobility in living standards*: Access to formal housing (51%)/electricity (49%)/landline telephone (8%) now and five years ago. *Assets*: Agricultural land (17%); cattle (9%); television (48%); books (43%); radio (76%); motor car (12%); other assets (18%). *Health and welfare*: Medical aid benefits (10%); disabled (5%); no injury/illness in past month (82%); reports problems with local school in past year (5%); reports problems with health service used in past month (6%); satisfied with health service used in past month (12%); satisfied with welfare service used in past year (7%). *Safety and security*: Feels safe (57%)/unsafe (35%) in neighbourhood; satisfied (51%)/dissatisfied (39%) with public safety; household member victim of theft in past twelve months (15%); household member harassed/molested/beaten up in past twelve months (8%). *Personal attitudes*: Optimist (72%); high anomia score (39%); feels education is useless (3%).

8. The strength of Zulu ethnicity as predictor of dissatisfaction deserves further comment. Being an isiZulu speaker features as a stronger predictor than livelihoods and living standards. It is only overshadowed by subjective variables such as evaluation of personal

safety, anomia and optimism. The very fact that the variable isiZulu speaker is crowded out by subjective variables suggests that it refers to personal rather than geographical identity. One interpretation is that Zulus feel politically alienated under the new political dispensation that has increasingly sidelined their leaders. Thus a bruised Zulu identity expresses itself in general discontent. An alternative explanation might be that the province of KwaZulu-Natal has suffered most from the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In view of the fact that health factors do not crowd out the language variable, the health explanation appears weaker than the alienation one.

9. According to the South African Advertising Research Foundation in its latest 2005 survey, cellular phone usage has grown from 2.4% of the population in 1996 to 41.6% in 2005. Black usage grew from 0.4% in 1996 to 36% in 2005. Telephones in the home have decreased from 30% in 1996 to 22% in 2004-5.

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Table 1**Life satisfaction***'How satisfied are you with your life in general?'*

	Black/ African %	Coloured %	Indian/ Asian %	White %	All South Africans %
Satisfied	51.6	79.0	72.1	81.9	58.1
Neutral	12.2	9.9	12.3	8.1	11.5
Dissatisfied	36.2	11.1	15.6	10.0	30.4
N (weighted)	9 071 948	930 097	282 475	1 478 874	11 763 394
Population share	77%	8%	2%	13%	100%

Satisfied (scores 6-10), neutral (score 5), dissatisfied (scores 0-4)

Source: Statistics South Africa 2002 General Household Survey

Table 2
International comparisons of life satisfaction: Euromodule countries

	Satisfied (scores 6-10 = highest)
Switzerland	8.3
Austria	8.3
Sweden	7.8
West Germany	7.8
Germany	7.6
White South Africans	7.6
Coloured South Africans	7.4
Slovenia	7.3
East Germany	7.2
Spain	7.2
Indian/Asian South Africans	6.8
Hungary	6.2
South Korea	6.0
<i>South Africa</i>	5.8
African/black South Africans	5.3
Turkey	4.6

Source: Euromodule (Nauenburg, 2004)

Table 3
Select indicators of South African material quality of life by race

	Black %	Coloured %	Indian %	White %	Total %
<i>Housing:</i>					
Formal detached dwelling	61	87	97	98	68
Informal dwelling (shack)	22	13	3	2	19
Good roof conditions	13	16	40	49	19
Poor roof conditions	25	15	7	2	20
Five or more rooms	30	32	59	73	36
<i>Infrastructure:</i>					
Piped water in dwelling	25	73	96	97	39
Flush toilet in dwelling	21	71	96	99	36
Main electricity supply	71	88	97	99	77
Landline telephone	13	41	73	76	24
Householder collects wood ¹	23	6	2	1	18
Householder carries water ¹	16	10	0	0	13
<i>Service delivery:</i>					
Regular mail delivery	50	81	97	98	60
Regular rubbish collection	45	80	96	90	54
Same-day rectification of piped water supply in case of interruptions	50	69	81	80	55
Problems with health services	33	31	21	8	29
<i>Ownership:</i>					
Radio	76	81	95	97	80
Television	47	75	91	95	57
Books	44	62	89	90	52
Cellphone	27	29	56	77	34
Vehicle	12	30	63	92	24
<i>Education¹:</i>					
Ability to read/write	85	92	98	100	87
Tertiary education	7	9	20	39	11
<i>Livelihoods¹:</i>					
Employed	43	49	46	61	46
Wage earner	28	38	40	47	31
Earns R1000 or more monthly	45	59	90	95	55
Lacks skills/qualifications to look for work	27	10	11	2	23
<i>Poverty:</i>					
Adults in household go hungry	9	4	1	0	7
Children in household go hungry	8	3	1	0	7
Average net positive ²	32	53	74	83	40
Weighted n in millions	9.07	.93	.28	1.47	11.7

Source: Statistics South Africa 2002 General Household Survey

¹ Refers to the respondent

² Calculated as the average value (%) for the 20 positive indicators listed in the table minus the average value (%) for the 8 negative indicators.

Table 4
Indicators of above-average life satisfaction

	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Sample Share (%)
<i>Sample average</i>	52	36	
Household characteristics:			
Formal detached dwelling	54	34	61
Very good roof condition	65	25	13
Occupies rent-free housing as part of employment contract	65	25	9
Occupies 5 rooms or more	54	33	30
Piped water in dwelling	57	31	25
Uninterrupted piped water supply	55	33	5 *
Main electricity supply	54	34	71
Flush toilet in dwelling	59	29	21
Landline telephone	59	29	13
Cellular phone	59	29	27
Mail delivery to dwelling, post box, or workplace	55	33	60
Owens television set	55	32	47
Owens radio	53	35	76
Owens vehicle	62	26	12
Owens bicycle	58	31	13
Owens clock or watch	53	35	80
Owens books	53	35	44
Owens cattle	57	32	9
Owens sheep	57	31	9
Owens poultry	55	33	23
Monthly household expenditure R2500 or higher	67	19	5
Salary is main source of household income	54	33	55
Benefits from 3-4 social grants	60	28	.3 *
Adults never go hungry	59	29	62
Children never go hungry	57	31	63 *
Respondent characteristics:			
60 years or older	55	33	12
Married	53	35	44
Spouse not living in household	56	31	13 *
Gave interview in Afrikaans or English	71	19	6
Tertiary education	65	23	7
Employed	55	32	43
Earns over R1000 per month	61	27	19 *
Medical aid beneficiary	66	22	10
Satisfied with health services received	53	36	11 *
Satisfied with welfare services received	53	38	6 *
Satisfied with public safety (scores 6-10)	71	20	49
Feels safe in neighbourhood (scores 6-10)	68	23	56
Feels 'very safe' walking at night	70	23	23
Optimistic about future	54	33	72

Source: Statistics South Africa 2002 General Household Survey

* Subsample: Own calculation. The size of the sample share is an approximation of the total sample; the percentages 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied' are based on the subsample total.

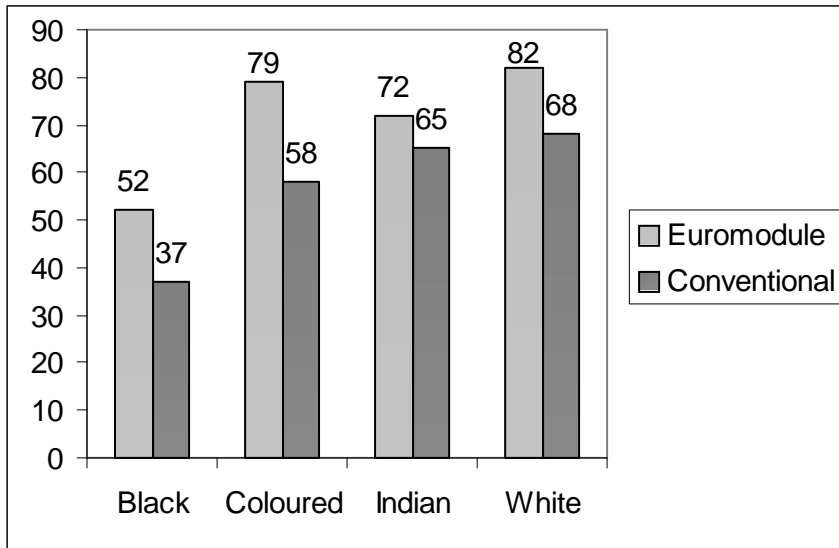
Table 5
Indicators of above-average dissatisfaction with life

	Satisfied %	Disatis- fied (%)	Sample share (%)
<i>Sample average</i>	52	36	
Household characteristics:			
Informal dwelling (shack)	44	44	22
Poor roof condition: weak or very weak	38	49	25
Water from neighbourhood tap	40	49	3
Water from public tap	47	41	17
Uses unsafe drinking water	49	41	12
Daily interruptions of piped water	46	43	3 *
Water is cut off due to non-payment	49	46	.5 *
Long delays in restoring piped water supply	38	52	.5 *
Pit or bucket latrine	49	39	34
Toilet off-site	41	44	4
No rubbish removal	49	39	7
Mail delivered to neighbour/school	46	43	16
Does not receive mail	44	44	12
Uses paraffin for cooking	45	43	21
Uses wood for cooking	51	38	26
Uses paraffin for heating	46	43	14
Uses candles for lighting	46	43	22
No household income	42	50	3
Monthly household expenditure under R400	47	41	40
Remittances main source of household income	47	41	17
Child grant recipient	48	41	9
Disability grant recipient	50	38	4
Insufficient food for adults	28	63	9
Insufficient food for children	29	62	5 *
Goods stolen from household member in past year	45	41	16
Household member harassed in past year	39	46	5
Household member assaulted in past year	34	52	3
Respondent characteristics:			
Divorced	49	40	4
Respondent gave interview in isiZulu	42	45	31
Resident of KwaZulu-Natal	39	48	21
Cannot read	50	39	15
Cannot write	50	39	16
Primary education or less	49	39	44
Not continuing education:			
- No money for fees	45	43	19
- Education useless	45	43	4
- Failed examinations	47	43	1
Cites problems with schooling:			
- Lack of books	58	30	3 *
- School fees too high	61	29	2 *
- Poor facilities	62	29	1 *
Unemployed (official definition)	43	45	17
Unemployed (extended definition, includes discouraged workseekers)	43	45	28
Disability	50	38	5
Suffered illness or injuries in past month			
- Diabetes	44	42	1 *
- Trauma	47	45	.5 *

- Tuberculosis	45	46	1	*
- Sexually transmitted disease	38	49	.07	*
- HIV/AIDS	46	54	.05	*
Reports problems with health services received	45	42	4	*
Dissatisfied with health services received	39	49	1	*
Used social worker services in past year	47	41	2	*
Dissatisfied with social welfare services	38	53	1	*
Collects wood for household use	47	41	23	
Carries water for household use	48	40	16	
Dissatisfied with public safety	31	58	40	
Feels unsafe in neighbourhood (scores 0-4)	29	59	36	
Feels 'very unsafe' walking at night	37	50	32	
Often feels lonely	47	40	62	
Does not enjoy work	48	40	55	
Feels life is overcomplicated	48	40	71	
Pessimistic about the future	45	44	28	

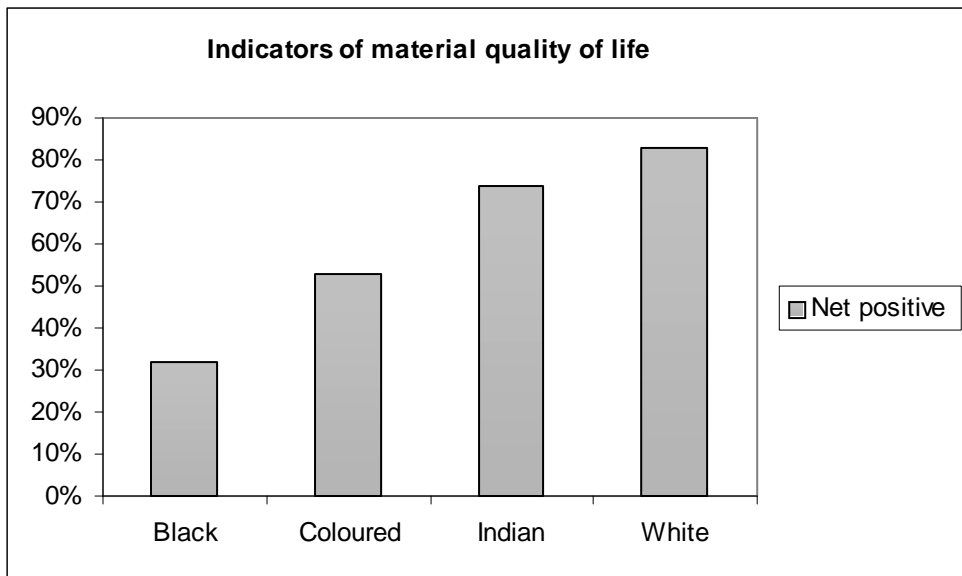
Source: Statistics South Africa 2002 General Household Survey

* Subsample: Own calculation. The size of the sample share is an approximation of the total sample; the percentages 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied' are based on the subsample total.



Source: Euromodule (Nauenburg, 2004) and South African Quality of Life Trends study (Møller, 2004)

Figure 1. Percentages satisfied with life in 2002 according to the Euromodule versus the conventional measure



Source: Statistics South Africa 2002 General Household Survey

Figure 2. Inequalities in material quality of life (28 indicators)