



DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence
in Human Development

Individual and Society

In June 2021, the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, conducted a snap online survey of 1,000 South Africans across the country, aged between 18 and 55 years. We explored various topical issues impacting quality of life in South Africa. We have released three reports in total; this is the third in the series.

Report 3: Quality of Life in South Africa

To investigate quality of life (QoL) during the pandemic, we used a short questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization. The survey (WHOQOL-BREF) locates physical and mental health, social relationships and environment at the core of how people experience QoL, and is defined by individuals' perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. The CoE-HUMAN's QoL Report not only draws from this definition, but from our own understanding of what the key obstacles inhibiting citizens from living a life of their own choosing.

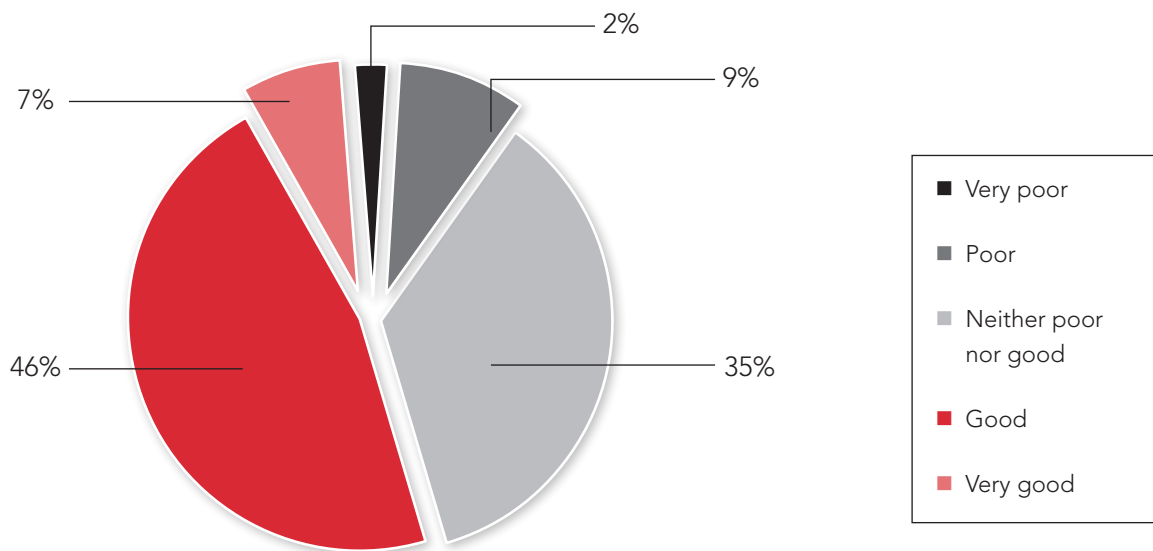
Survey findings

Perceptions of overall quality of life

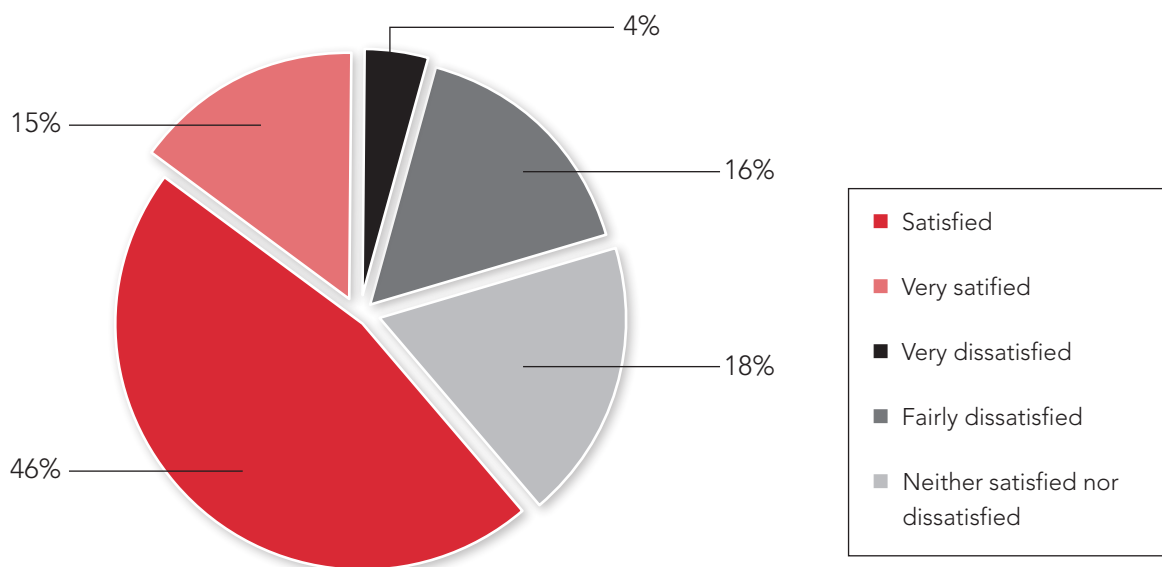
Overall, half of participants (53%) indicated that their quality of life (QoL) was good or very good. Also, most participants (61%) were satisfied with their health.

A previous report on the effects of Covid-19 ‘lockdowns’ in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand found that the pandemic reduced happiness and increased negative emotions, with greater effects seen with more stringent measures and as fatality rates increased.¹ Our results reinforce these findings with one in three people experiencing frequent negative mental strain (stress, anxiety and depression) during the pandemic.² This is worrying and calls for greater national prioritisation of mental health services and support.

How would you rate your overall quality of life?



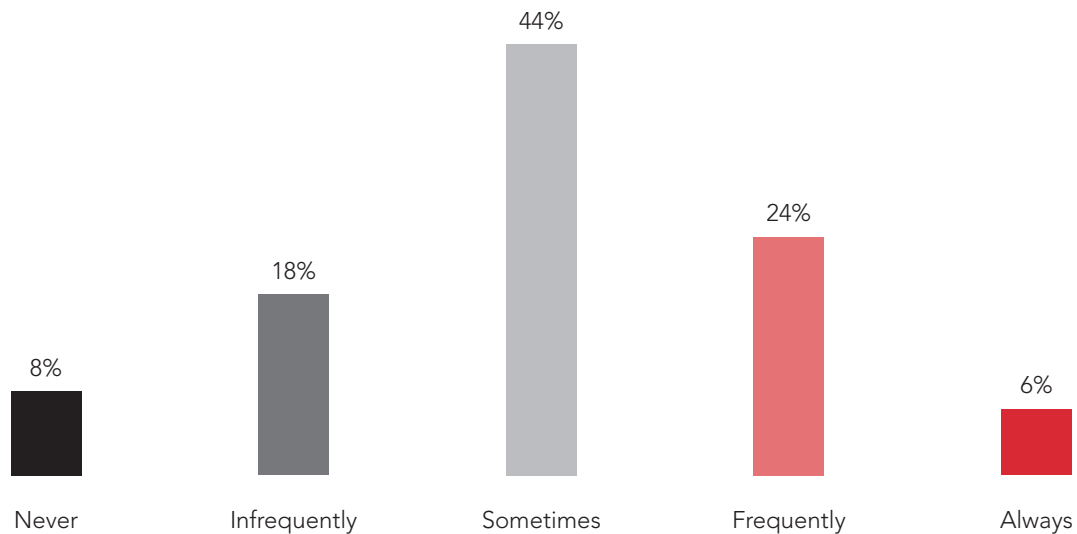
How satisfied are you with your health?



¹ Greyling T, Rossouw S, Adhikari T. A tale of three countries: How did Covid-19 lockdown impact happiness?. GLO Discussion Paper; 2020.

² Salari, N., Hosseini-Far, A., Jalali, R. et al. Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Global Health 16, 57 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-020-00589-w>

How often do you have negative feelings, such as blue mood, despair, anxiety or depression?



Quality of life enhancers

Most respondents enjoyed life (87%), had enough energy for everyday life (88%), and were accepting of their appearance (81%). Six out of ten respondents surveyed reported that their life had meaning. Most respondents were satisfied with the conditions of their living space (60%). More than half of people were satisfied with health services (55%). Most respondents were satisfied with their own capacity to do their work (65%) and with their personal relationships (59%). While, around half were satisfied with the support they get from their friends (48%).

Purpose, self-esteem, living space, energy, enjoyment, social support (family and friends) and critical services that are functional (health services) are important enhancers of QoL. For many of these, the majority of respondents felt that their life quality was enhanced by these factors.

Quality of life challenges

The vast majority (76%) of respondents reported limited opportunities for leisure activities. Alongside this, one in three South Africans were not happy with their sex life, and less satisfied with their sleep quality. It is likely these phenomena are related, as levels of physical activity impact across multiple domains of health and wellbeing (including sex³ and sleep).

Half of the people surveyed reported not having sufficient money for their needs (48%). In fact, only one in every five people reported having sufficient money to meet needs. A quarter of respondents reported concern around safety in their daily life (23%), with 42% feeling moderately safe, and only 35% reported feeling safe. Nine out of ten respondents' QoL was impacted by load shedding (89%), and half (50%) reported being impacted by water shortages. Furthermore, 70% of South Africans reported that their QoL was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3 Young M, Penhollow T. Sexual desirability and sexual performance: Does exercise and fitness really matter. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*. 2004 Oct 5;7.

Less satisfying sex life, poor sleep, economic stress, not feeling safe, critical services not functioning well (electricity, water) are factors that South Africans are struggling with and diminishes their QoL.

Dire socio-economic circumstances contributes to poorer overall QoL

Those respondents with greater economic pressures (less education, unemployment or concern around job security, less disposable income, a greater number of adults living at home or a greater number of children at home) reported poorer overall QoL.

Several of these same pressures (less education, unemployment or concern of job security, and less disposable income) were also significantly related to greater reporting of mental stress (anxiety, despair or depression).

Conclusions

South Africans display resilience and in the general sense, have a positive perception of their quality of life, health and circumstances. The pandemic is however impacting people's mental health. The significant challenges that impact quality of life in South Africa are primarily economic and infrastructural.

Investment in job creation, economic upliftment and critical infrastructure, including provision of mental health services and safe spaces for outdoor exercise, are essential priorities. These investments will enhance South Africans' quality of life, which in turn, will contribute to better human development outcomes.

For more information please contact Beth Amato at the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development, based at the University of the Witwatersrand: coe.human@wits.ac.za