Gender dimensions of quality of life:
The determinants of life satisfaction among South African Gauteng residents

A multilevel psycho-demographic analysis of the Gauteng City-Region Observatory's (GCRO) quality of life survey (2009-2024).

Evaluating subjective well-being requires an understanding of quality of life (QoL), with life satisfaction being acknowledged as a crucial socioeconomic indicator. Psycho-demographic research emphasises how socialisation, gender identity, language, racial group membership, cultural distinctiveness, and demographic traits interact with internal psychological processes to affect subjective well-being. Thus, people's comparison of their present situation to their ideal existence, taking into account both financial and spiritual factors, is reflected in life satisfaction.

Therefore, this study explored gender-related variations in life satisfaction among sex-stratified South Africans living in the Gauteng province.

Methodology

This study used data from the Quality of Life (QoL) survey conducted by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) between 2009 and 2024. The University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, the Gauteng Provincial Government, and the South African Local Government Association have partnered to form the GCRO.

Following the exclusion of missing variables in the dataset cleaning, the total number of South African nationals from the 2009–2024 GCRO datasets was 70,314, consisting of 33,325 males and 36,990 females for the sample size for this study. The age range of 18 to 48+ years was included in the sample size of 70,314, which was obtained by combining the datasets from various survey years.

The field collection instrument included the GCRO Quality of Life Rounds 1-7 (2009-2024) survey – Full Questionnaires. These questions focused on:

1. demographic details of the enumerated population (population group, sex, age, language);

2. housing (dwelling type, tenure, satisfaction with dwelling, perceived quality of housing and housing allocation);

3. household services (water, sanitation, refuse removal, energy sources);

4. migration and health (including disability);

5. education and employment (including employment sector);

6. community services (amenities, transport, leisure activities, safety and crime);

7. financial data (including debts, income, and social grants);

8. household assets (Telephone, Television, Computer, Radio, Music system, Satellite TV [e.g., MNET, DSTV], Internet connection, Car, Bicycle, Fridge);

9. public participation and governance;

10. perceived personal well-being; and

11. quality of life of respondents.

Data was managed and analysed using the statistical software STATA version 2021.
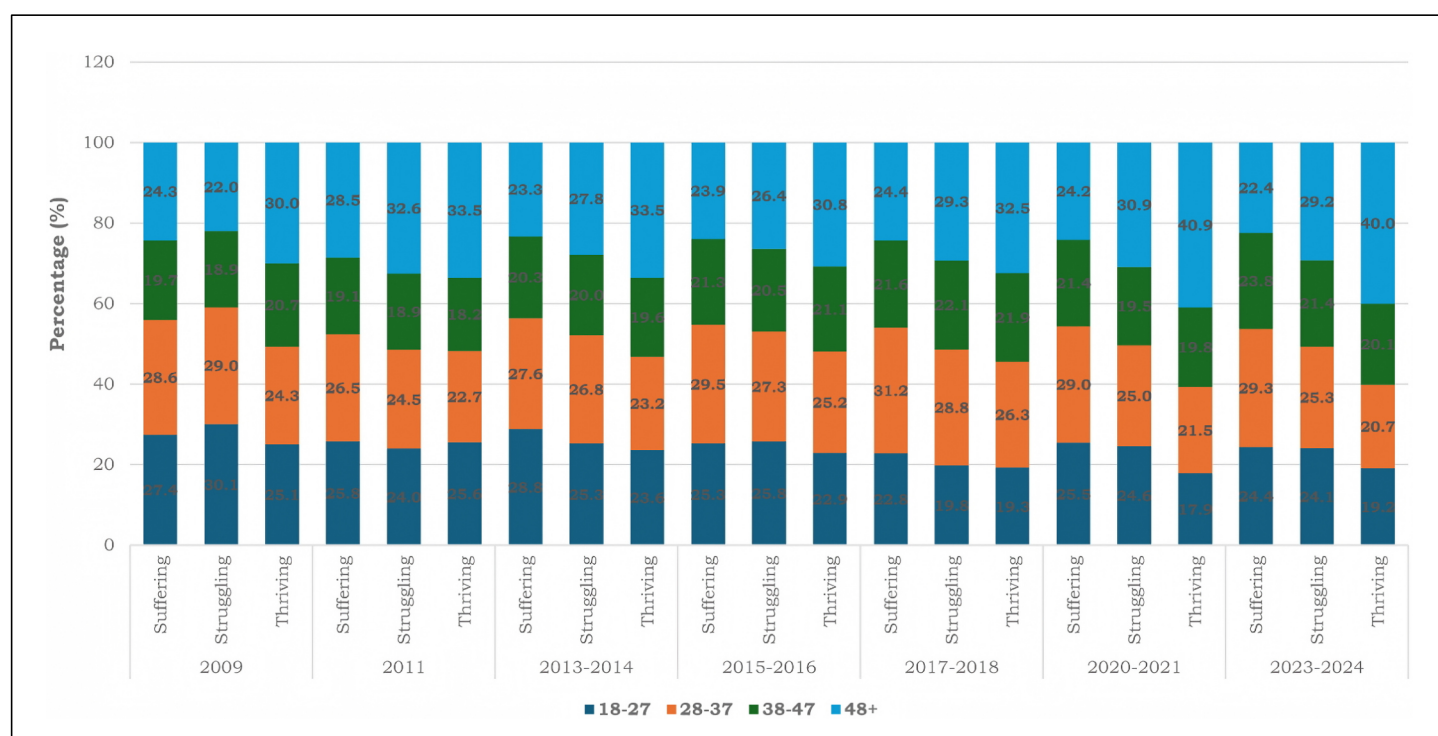
Key findings

This study underlined the impact of age, education, income, employment, household size, medical assistance, and media access as major factors influencing life satisfaction among individuals in Gauteng, South Africa. Males (63.5%) and females (63.3%) reported somewhat different levels of life satisfaction, according to the grouped bar chart below.

Due to cultural and socio-economic factors, women generally reported higher levels of satisfaction, despite the slight gender discrepancies.
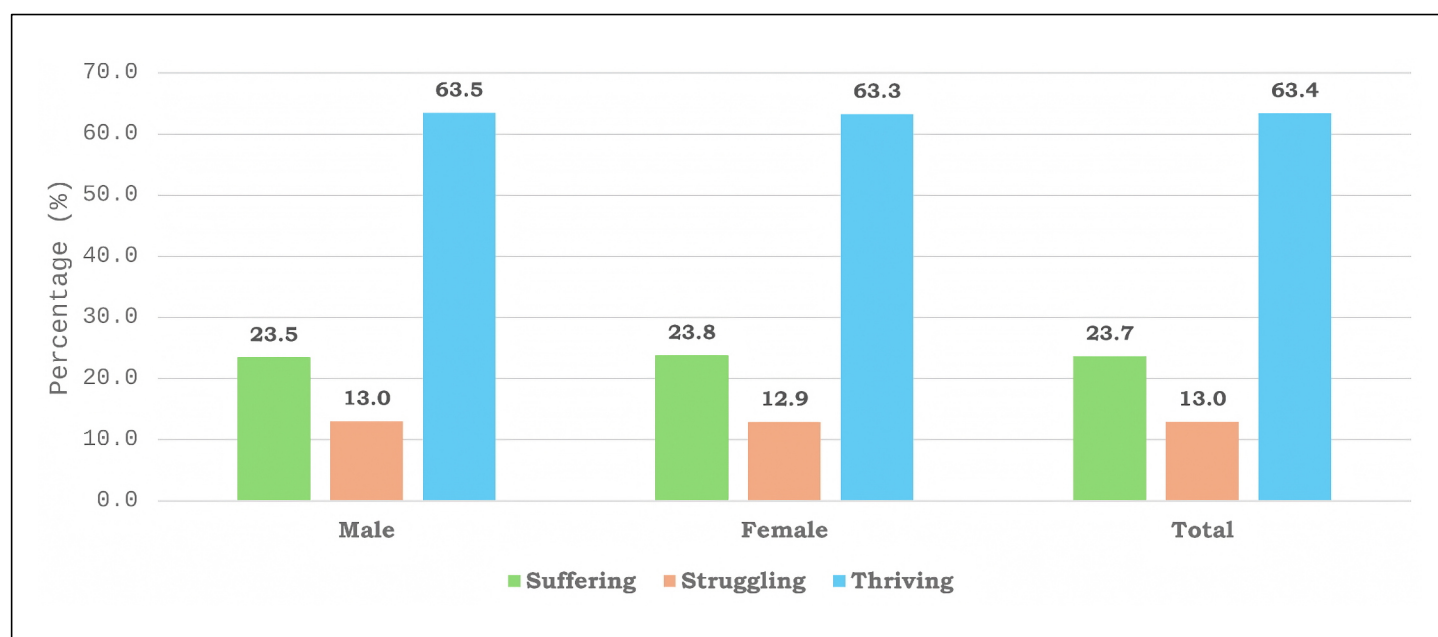
According to the stacked bar graph below, the age groups 18-27 and 38-47 years old indicated the highest levels of struggling and suffering life satisfaction. However, the age groups of 28-37 years and 48+ years indicated the highest levels of thriving life satisfaction.

According to the findings, income, employment, and higher education all considerably improve life satisfaction (p<0.000). Middle-aged life satisfaction is greatly influenced by career fulfillment, job satisfaction, financial stability, and concerns about debt and retirement. While conflict and a poor work-life balance reduce satisfaction, supportive social and family relationships improve it. For older persons, life satisfaction is determined by their health, financial security, social ties, living conditions, and access to healthcare, with excellent health and economic stability enhancing satisfaction and chronic disease or financial strain decreasing it.

In order to increase life satisfaction outcomes, these findings highlight the significance of addressing education, employment, and health access while taking gendered and age-specific requirements into account.

Conclusion

The authors recommend that policymakers establish age-targeted social programs for middle-aged adults, such as financial literacy training, career support, and healthcare access, as well as ensure social engagement and support systems for older persons, in order to sustain high life satisfaction.

Based on their findings, the authors make three main suggestions for South Africa:

1. The Gauteng City Region Observatory (GCRO) should incorporate sociology, psychology, and psycho-demographics into its surveys to conduct intersectional studies of gendered life satisfaction and well-being.

2. To address economic and social deterioration, municipalities should implement activities that empower both men and women. Simultaneously, public awareness efforts on gender roles and stereotypes should promote equality, allowing people to pursue personal and professional goals free of customary constraints.

3. Provinces must implement gender-responsive policy measures to alleviate systemic inequities.

Reference:

"Gender dimensions of quality of life": The determinants of life satisfaction among South Africans residing in the Gauteng province – using a multilevel psychodemographic analysis of the GCRO's quality of life survey (2009-2024).

Akokuwebe, M. E.[1], Likoko, S.[2], Miles-Timotheus, S.[3], & Mabala, M.[4]

Affiliations

[1] SAMRC Developmental Pathways for Health Research Unit, Department of Paediatrics, School of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

[2] Demography and Population Studies, School of Social Sciences, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

[3] Demography and Population Studies, School of Social Sciences, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

[4] Group Finance, Johannesburg, South Africa

Corresponding author: Monica Akokuwebe, monica.akokuwebe@wits.ac.za

Funding: The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.