

# Subjective social indicators

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## I. Introduction

Much of the past work on social indicators has been concerned with measures of 'hard' objective conditions – the number of slum dwellings, the proportion of young people in higher education, the ratio of doctors per thousand population, etc. The present article looks at another measure of the quality of life – the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction felt by people with various aspects of their lives. The 'objective world' is filtered through the individual's own perceptions and then weighed according to his expectations, experiences, attitudes, and present circumstances. These assessments have come to be called subjective social indicators and the main purpose of this article is to present the findings of two small pilot enquiries that explored the possibility, usefulness, and difficulties of using interview survey methods to measure them.

## II. Historical background

In announcing at the end of 1972 the first title *Social Indicators and Societal Monitoring* (Wilcox *et al*) in its 'Social Indicators Book Series' the publishers noted that it contained "more than 600 annotations from over 1,000 cited sources (and was) conceived to facilitate interaction between workers in the social indicator 'movement' ". The semi-apologetic single quotation marks seem hardly necessary when one considers the expansion of interest that has taken place in the past six years; before the mid-1960's such phrases as social indicators, social reporting, social accounts, quality of life were almost entirely absent from the vocabulary of either social scientists or politicians; today, we have reached the point where continuous work on social indicators is under serious consideration in at least half-a-dozen countries.

For the historian of social statistics in Britain this late explosion of interest and activity must be surprising. Apart from the Census material there has long been an abundance of series of data relating to topics other than national income, wages and prices. For example, the National Food Survey, with its measures of the adequacy and inadequacies of the diet of various types of British families, dates back to 1940 and has appeared every year since then without a break. In the private sector (but available to the general public through the SSRC Survey Archive) the National Readership Survey, with its annual reports over nearly twenty years, has provided an enormous (but largely unused) flow of information about many facets of the informational

and day-dreaming tastes and standards of the British people and the way they have changed (or often failed to change) as incomes have expanded and years of formal schooling have lengthened.

In the United States spasmodic interest in hard social indicators goes back even further. Under the stimulus of President Hoover and the Great Depression there appeared in 1933 the massive and scholarly publication "Recent Social Trends". Its potential as a starting point for continuing reports on social conditions was considerable, but its achievement small – probably because of the energy and excitement of President Roosevelt's policies to deal with the Depression. The opportunity was repeated almost ten years later when William F. Ogburn (editor of the original "Recent Social Trends") edited the May 1942 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*, and with a team of outstanding social scientists (Philip Hauser, Louis Wirth, Gardiner Means, Margaret Mead, etc) went over much the same ground and brought the material up-to-date – urban decay, race relations, family life, the use of leisure etc. But again, presumably because of the war, there was little response either from government or from social scientists.

Almost another quarter of a century passed before the movement really got off the ground. We can reasonably regard 1966 as the take-off year and the United States as the launching pad when, with the appearance of works by Bertram Gross and Raymond Bauer, a receptive audience of legislators, civil servants, university teachers, and civic leaders became familiar with such phrases as social accounting, social report, social indicators and began to see what lay behind these concepts and to recognise their possible value in helping to shape public policies.

Some idea of the limitations of the resulting collections of 'objective' social indicators is gained if we look at a typical publication. The first report (March 1970) of the Urban Institute on "The Quality of Life in Metropolitan Washington (D.C.)"<sup>1</sup> is noteworthy for various reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, it shows how a group of intelligent and active researchers using very simple techniques can bring together valuable comparative statistics with an acceptable level of reliability – acceptable, that is, for social action (see Otis Dudley Duncan). The established fact that over the two years covered by the report the infant mortality rate was 30 per cent higher in

<sup>1</sup>It compared social conditions in Washington (D.C.) with those in 16 other large U.S. cities.

Chicago than in Minneapolis indicated clearly enough the need for improving this aspect of the quality of life in Chicago.

Secondly, the report exposes the fragility and ambiguity of many so-called hard statistics. The fact that the 'robbery rate' in Baltimore was 25 per cent higher than in the nearby city of Washington may mean no more than that the generally high level of unreported crime is much higher in Washington than in Baltimore.

Thirdly, the report demonstrated the impossibility of aggregating the multiplicity of indicators used into a single index expressing "quality of life". For example, of the 17 cities studied, Washington had the second lowest proportion of low income families and the highest proportion of men rejected for military service after undergoing their mental tests. Does this mean that the quality of life in Washington is higher, the same, or lower as compared with life in Cincinnati which had the second highest proportion of low income families and almost the lowest proportion of army rejects? It is true that the authors make no attempt to produce such an overall social indicator for each city, but others have suggested or hoped that such an index might eventually emerge.

Fourthly, in describing their fourteen 'quality of life' areas and the indicators used in each, the authors make clear that the 'hard' statistics they used were often very poor measures of the qualities they had in mind. For example, the quality of life in a community depends heavily upon the extent of what the authors describe as social disintegration, citizen participation, community concern, and racial equality; but can these be measured adequately by (respectively) known narcotic addicts per 10,000 population, voting turnout, contributions per head to charity appeals, and unemployment rates?

The more one considers these concepts the more one is persuaded that the way forward lies not in adding more measures of conventional hard statistics, but rather in supplementing the existing ones by adding in a clear-cut way a new dimension to the definition of 'quality of life' – a dimension of the satisfaction (happiness, contentment, psychological well-being, etc) felt by those who constitute the community and are the final consumers of society's output of 'goods' and 'bads' and therefore the best judges of society's performance. In short, it is the very thoroughness of work along the lines of The Urban Institute that compels one to turn to subjective social indicators and to the problems of reliable quantification of states of mind and mood that normally are regarded as 'hard' only by psychologists.

There is then no need for the social scientist to feel that he trivialises his discipline when he

embarks on the study of subjective social indicators. This does not mean, however, there are not substantial difficulties to be overcome. Different people will place different meanings on the word 'satisfaction' – from high elation to a mere absence of pain. Again, one person may give different meanings to the same word in different areas of his life so that when he expresses satisfaction with his job and satisfaction with his marriage he may be using two different and unrelated measurement systems. A further difficulty is created by the fact that people differ and change in the way they react to failure and defeat: some people maintain or even raise their satisfaction level over a wide and apparently unrelated range of areas through a diffused loss of self-esteem. And then, too, there is implicit the assumption that high levels of satisfaction are 'good' and low levels are 'bad'. On occasion the reverse may be true (and rational and healthy) both for the individual and for society.

### III. Subjective social indicators today

All these and other difficulties were known and appreciated by those who work on subjective social indicators, but this awareness has prevented the undertaking of two large-scale studies in the United States (Bradburn; Carr and Converse) and two small-scale and exploratory studies in this country carried out by the SSRC Survey Unit<sup>2</sup>. In the first of the latter interviewing of a quota nation-wide urban sample of 213 persons aged 16 and over was carried out in March 1971 by Research Services Limited the second with a quota sample of 593 respondents in the seven largest conurbations in England was executed by Social and Community Planning Research in November 1971<sup>3</sup>.

The main purposes of our two British enquiries were those usually associated with questionnaire studies: first, to test the questionnaire for adequacy of range, its clarity of language, its sequence of issues, its length, its potential for eliciting additional important aspects of the research topic; and secondly to provide experimental responses to enable us to experiment with statistical techniques of analysis that might reveal the degree of interdependence between various domains and indicate those most difficult to measure reliably what we were looking for.

We have included here in simple form some of the elementary tabulations of the substantive findings from the two enquiries. We then discuss some of the lessons learned and the reasons

<sup>2</sup>John Hall of the Unit shouldered, with great patience and imagination, a very large part of the difficult tasks of developing our questionnaire and directing the analysis of the data.

<sup>3</sup>See Annex A for composition of these samples and comparison with larger probability samples.

which lies behind the structure of our third questionnaire.

### March 1971 pilot survey

After a handful of unstructured pre-pilot discussions with members of the public it was decided to build the questionnaire around eleven domains:

Housing	Family life
Neighbourhood	Friendships
Health	Education
Job	Police courts
Financial situation	Welfare services
Leisure	

On each domain the respondent was asked:

- to indicate on an 11-point scale (from 0 to 10) how satisfied he (or she) was;
- what changes would be needed to make him more satisfied; and
- what changes could happen to make him less satisfied.

In addition to these satisfaction/dissatisfaction ratings in each domain, the respondent was asked to give:

- an overall self-rating on 'things in general'
- an overall rating for his position on the scale 'about 4 or 5 years ago'
- where he expected to be on the scale 'about 4 or 5 years from now'
- where on the scale he felt that people like himself were 'entitled to be'.

In addition to these points of reference across time, in order to obtain points of reference across social classes, the respondent was asked to use the same 0 to 10 scale to indicate where he thought various groups currently stood; these were:

- unskilled manual workers
- skilled manual workers
- office workers
- professional people (e.g. doctors, teachers)
- company directors, business executives
- shopkeepers and small businessmen
- old age pensioners
- investors and shareholders

Each respondent was then asked to indicate to which one of these eight groups he considered he belonged.

In an attempt to relate responses to socio-psychological circumstances the questionnaire also included a modified Srole anomaly scale<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, the classification material collected related mainly to the domains dealt with in the body of the questionnaire, i.e. it recorded respondent's occupation, income, educational background, household composition, use of the welfare services, housing accommodation.

### Satisfaction/dissatisfaction 'in general' self-rating

#### Whole sample

Respondents showed very little difficulty in using a 0 to 10 numerical scale to indicate their levels of satisfaction with life. On each of the four main perspectives offered them (now, 4-5 years past, 4-5 years future, and 'entitlement') at least 96 per cent of the respondents chose for themselves specific points on the scales. Table 1 groups and summarises the self-ratings of the whole sample.

Table 1 Satisfaction ratings

	Percentages			
	Perspective of self			
	Now <sup>5</sup>	4-5 years past <sup>1</sup>	4-5 years future	Entitlement
Satisfaction rating:				
0, 1 (low)	6	3	8	1
2, 3	14	9	14	3
4, 5	29	36	14	20
6, 7	27	27	24	51
8, 9	20	18	26	10
10 (high)	4	7	14	15
Average rating	5.53	5.86	6.17	7.45

<sup>1</sup>For a brief reminder of some conditions in March 1971 and March 1966-67 see Annex B.

The present is seen to be a little less satisfactory than the past; and the future is expected to be better than both the past and the present. But the most striking gap is between what one currently has in the way of a satisfactory life and what one feels entitled to - the average NOW rating is only 74 per cent of the average ENTITLEMENT score.

#### Sub-sample groups

##### Satisfaction: NOW

The various sub-samples can be grouped into three categories: those with an average self-rating of at least 6; those with an average rating

<sup>4</sup>For an account of the scale that was used see Annex C. Briefly a low anomaly score reflects confidence in one's fellow men and confidence in the future; conversely, a high anomaly score reflects distrust, pessimism and cynicism.

of 5 or less; and the remainder. Those coming within the two extreme categories are:

Self-rating 6 or more:		Self-rating 5 or less:	
Business executives	6.8	Unskilled workers	4.8
Income £2,000 and over	6.7	Old age pensioners	4.7
AB social grade <sup>5</sup>	6.6	DE social grade <sup>5</sup>	4.7
TEA 19 and over <sup>6</sup>	6.4	Small shopkeepers	4.1
Office workers	6.0	Widowed	4.1
Unmarried	6.0		

The intermediary 'remainder' category contained the following groups: men (5.5), women (5.5), married (5.7), aged 15-34 (5.5), 35-54 (5.8), 55 and over (5.3), TEA 15 or less<sup>6</sup> (5.3), TEA 16-18<sup>6</sup> (5.8), C1 Social Grade<sup>5</sup> (5.6), C2 Social Grade<sup>5</sup> (5.4), all those with incomes below £2,000 per annum (5.2), skilled manual workers (5.6), and professional workers (5.9).

Within each of the two extreme categories there is, of course, much overlapping of the groups; in the high satisfaction category AB grade people tend also to be those with the highest incomes, with a high incidence of higher education, and are often employed as business executives. At the other extreme those in the DE grade are often unskilled manual workers, old age pensioners and elderly widows of manual workers.

#### Satisfaction: NOW AND THE PAST

One rough measure of satisfaction with life is indicated when respondents gave to their present conditions a higher rating than the rating they gave to their conditions as of 4 to 5 years ago. On this basis, as we have seen, the sample as a whole felt that the quality of life had declined in recent years - from an average rating of 5.86 with things as they were 4 or 5 years ago, to 5.53 with conditions today - a fall of 6 per cent. But this sense of decline was not common to all sub-sections of the sample; in some it was much greater than 6 per cent, and in others there was no decline at all, but instead a feeling that NOW is appreciably better than the recent PAST.

Those groups where comparative past and present self-ratings indicated a sense of improvement in life over the past few years were the young (aged 15 to 34), the unmarried, those who had received full-time education at least until the age of 19, and those in the middle class (i.e. with relatively high incomes and with executive jobs in business and industry). Those indicating on the same basis a more than average sense of deterioration were the elderly (mainly old age pensioners and widows), and the lower middle class (shopkeepers and owners of small businesses).

<sup>5</sup>The four social-occupational groups used were: AB=middle class; C1=lower middle class; C2=skilled manual workers; DE=unskilled and those mainly dependent on social security for income.

<sup>6</sup>Terminal Education Age=age when full-time schooling finished.

NOW rated higher than PAST—by at least 5%:		NOW rated lower than PAST—by at least 15%:	
Unmarried	+15%	Widows	-35%
15-34 age	+8%	Pensioners	-32%
£2,000 p.a. or more	+8%	Shopkeepers	-29%
Business executives	+8%	Income below £650	-24%
TEA 19 and over	+5%	C1 social grade	-23%
AB social grade	+5%	Age 55 or more	-22%
		DE social grade	-16%

Again there is much overlapping of the groups within each category and additionally it is clear that for the most part those who had given themselves a high NOW rating were also the groups most likely to register improvements over the past 4 to 5 years. And, conversely, those registering low NOW ratings were also the groups who felt that their decline has been greatest over recent years.

#### Satisfaction: NOW AND THE FUTURE

For the sample as a whole the average score on the 0 to 10 ladder when they were asked "Where would you put yourself as you expect to be about 4 to 5 years from now?" was 6.17. The highest average levels (7 or more) were recorded by the unmarried (7.0), those with a TEA of 19 or more (7.2), AB grade (7.4), and business executives (7.4).

The lowest average FUTURE scores (5.4 or less) came from widows (4.8), DE grade (5.2), those with incomes below £650 per annum (5.4), shopkeepers (4.9), and old age pensioners (4.9).

However, when FUTURE ratings are related to NOW ratings it appears that every group, even old age pensioners, expects to be more satisfied with life in 4 or 5 years' time than it is today. Those expecting the highest relative increases in satisfaction with 'things in general' over the next few years were often those who had given a low rating to their present position; thus, widows looking ahead raised their expected ratings by 19 per cent, unskilled workers by 32 per cent, and small shopkeepers by 44 per cent. The outstanding exception to this widespread optimism among the under-privileged was found among the elderly; those aged 55 or more gave themselves a 5.4 FUTURE rating as against their NOW rating of 5.3 - a mere 2 per cent improvement.

#### Satisfaction: NOW AND ENTITLEMENT

When respondents were asked to use the 0-10 ladder to indicate the level of satisfaction with life that they thought people like themselves were entitled to there was a substantial jump in ratings; the average worked out at 7.45 - 35 per cent higher than they had rated their present level of satisfaction. This large gap between 'reality' and entitlement was most marked among those who had given themselves low NOW scores; the gap was usually at its lowest among those well

satisfied with present conditions. Every group, however, said that NOW fell short of ENTITLEMENT.

ENTITLEMENT at least 40% higher than NOW:		ENTITLEMENT up to 25% higher than NOW:	
Widows	62%	Unmarried	23%
C2 social grade	42%	TEA 19 and over	15%
DE social grade	45%	AB social grade	23%
Unskilled	49%	Income £2,000 p.a. or more	14%
Shopkeepers	56%	Business executives	21%
Pensioners	46%		

In short, a sense of being deprived of their just rewards runs through all sections of British society, but is felt most deeply by the working class and (not necessarily the same) the poor.

### Other people's satisfaction

As another basis for comparison each respondent was given a card on which was listed eight types of persons and asked, using the 0-10 scale, to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied the respondent thought each group is today. Broadly, the middle class types were thought to be highly satisfied, while the working class types were thought to be fairly dissatisfied; rated sharply at the bottom in terms of putative satisfaction came old age pensioners.

The respondent was then asked to indicate to which of the eight he thought he belonged; (all but two people were able to do this matching). This step enabled us to compare the whole sample's assessment of a social category with the assessment given to themselves by those in the category when asked: "Where on the ladder would you put yourself nowadays?" The discrepancies were sometimes quite striking. For example, the sample as a whole gave old age pensioners a satisfaction rating of only 2.5, but people who identified themselves as pensioners gave themselves a satisfaction self-rating of 4.7. By contrast, the sample gave professional people

a satisfaction score of 7.0, but those who described themselves as professional people turned in a satisfaction self-rating of only 5.9 for themselves.

	Imputed average rating by whole sample (a)	Self-rating by those in the category (b)	(b) as percentage of (a)
<i>Social categories:</i>			
Business executives	8.0	6.8	85
Professional people	7.0	5.9	84
Investors, shareholders	6.4	6.0	94
Office workers	5.9	6.0	102
Skilled manual workers	5.6	5.6	100
Shopkeepers	4.9	4.1	84
Unskilled manual workers	4.3	4.8	111
Old age pensioners	2.5	4.7	188

### The domains

The eleven domains were all dealt with in the same way: the respondent was asked:

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with . . . x . . . ? (Using the 0 to 10 ladder);

What changes would be needed in . . . x . . . to make you more satisfied?

What sort of things could happen in . . . x . . . to make you less satisfied?

After this stage had been completed the respondent was then shown a card which listed the 11 domains, asked if he wished to add any more which were important in affecting his overall satisfaction with life, and then from the total list asked to indicate which one he thought was most important in determining his general satisfaction with life, which next most important for him, and finally which he thought least important. (In fact, very few additions were made to the list by respondents.) To arrange the replies to these supplementary questions in a ranking order, 2 points were awarded for each 'most important', 1 point for each 'next most important', and -1 for each 'least important'. The findings are summarised in Table II below.

Table II Satisfaction ratings for domains

	Scale rate <sup>1</sup> (percentages)						Average rating	Satisfaction order	Importance order
	0, 1	2, 3	4, 5	6, 7	8, 9	10			
Family life	1	2	6	10	27	54	8.8	1	2
Friendships	1	4	9	17	31	38	8.1	2	7
Health	1	3	8	19	38	31	8.0	3	1
Housing	1	3	7	25	30	34	7.9	4	5
Job	2	1	11	25	36	25	7.8	5	4
District	2	6	14	18	32	28	7.4	6	9
Leisure	2	8	13	18	33	26	7.3	7	11
Children's education	3	8	12	21	32	24	7.2	8	8
Police and courts	3	6	18	26	29	18	6.9	9	10
Welfare services	4	12	18	24	28	14	6.5	10	6
Financial situation	10	12	25	25	24	4	5.5	11	3

<sup>1</sup>Range of assessments: 0 represents complete dissatisfaction; 10 represents complete satisfaction.

In terms of respondents' satisfactions with conditions the domains can be looked at in four groups:

The three where *very high* satisfaction is recorded: family life, friendships and personal health. Of these three the respondents attach very high importance to health and family life; the other (friendships) while rated as highly satisfactory is considered to be of only moderate importance in any overall assessment of the satisfaction of life.

The four where *high* satisfaction is enjoyed: housing, job, district and leisure; two of these – housing and job – are also rated high on importance in determining the respondent's general satisfaction with life; but the other two – district and leisure – rate very low in importance. The next three where satisfaction is *comparatively* low: children's education, the police and courts, and the welfare services; the first two of these also have low rankings of importance in the eyes of the respondents and even the welfare services are said by respondents to be of only moderate importance to them in overall life-satisfaction.

The one – respondent's financial situation – where satisfaction is *low*: and this is a domain which is judged by respondents to be very high in importance – not far behind health and family life in determining overall satisfaction.

### November 1971 survey

For the second pilot seven of the original eleven domains were retained (housing, neighbourhood, health, job, leisure, family life, and education); one was rephrased ('financial situation' became 'standard of living'), three were dropped (friendships, police and courts, and welfare services), and four new ones added (marriage, religion, being a housewife – for married women only – and the level and quality of democracy in Britain today). The questioning, therefore, was essentially concerned with twelve domains.

We also changed the sequence in which these were put to the respondent. In the first pilot questions about 'financial situation' came early in the interview and it was suspected that the initial replies might have affected assessment on

the later non-financial domains. This time, therefore, ratings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with personal income and wealth came almost at the end of the interview.

One further important change was made. In the first pilot we asked respondents to use an 11-point scale (from 0 to 10) to show how satisfied or dissatisfied he (or she) felt in each domain. This time we shifted to a 7-point scale (from 1 to 7) since this was the scale being used in the United States by Professor Campbell and we wished to compare results.

In addition to these satisfaction/dissatisfaction ratings in each domain, the respondent, as in the earlier pilot, was asked to give:

- an overall self-rating on 'things in general now'
- an overall rating for his position on the scale 'about five years ago'
- where he expected to be on the scale 'about 5 years from now'
- where on the scale he felt that people like himself were 'entitled to be'.

In an attempt to relate responses to social and psychological circumstances the questionnaire also included: the modified Srole scale to measure anomie; a propensity-to-worry scale and a semantic differential scale concerned with psychological moods and states.

The classification material collected again related mainly to the domains dealt with in the body of the questionnaire.

### Summary figures

Before dealing in detail with the replies on each domain it may help to put them in perspective. We consider broadly the findings on all domains in reply to the summarising question that came at the end of each domain – "All things considered how satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall with your (house, district, job, etc). Which number (on the 1 to 7 scale) comes closest to how satisfied or dissatisfied you are?" At each stage the respondent was reminded that 7 denoted complete satisfaction, while 1 denoted complete dissatisfaction.

Table III Levels of satisfaction in each domain

	Mean	Scale rate <sup>1</sup> (percentages)							Don't know	Number (=10)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Marriage	6.5	1	1	*	1	7	22	68	*	
Family life	6.1	1	2	1	3	14	26	51	2	
Job	6.0	1	1	2	5	18	32	41	—	
District	5.7	2	1	3	5	20	40	29	—	
Health	5.7	4	2	4	8	12	28	40	2	
Being a housewife	5.7	4	3	4	8	13	26	42	—	
Spare time	5.5	3	3	4	8	22	28	31	4	
Housing	5.4	4	1	3	12	26	27	27	—	
Standard of living	5.1	3	3	7	15	27	25	18	2	
Education received	4.9	7	4	6	16	26	21	20	—	
Religion	4.8	—	11	12	22	19	15	21	—	
Democratic standards	4.7	4	6	8	22	28	17	11	4	
Average	5.5	3	3	4	10	19	26	34	1	

\*Less than 0.5%.

<sup>1</sup>Range of assessments: 1 is low satisfaction: 7 is high satisfaction

<sup>2</sup>In some cases the base is less than 593, since for some respondents the question was not relevant—e.g. those not married, not going out to work, not a housewife etc.

In terms of average levels of satisfaction the domains fall into three groups:

Those with extremely high scores – marriage<sup>7</sup>, family life, and job:

Those with average to high scores – district, health, being a housewife, spare time and housing: and

Those with comparatively low scores – standard of living, education received, religion, and the quality and practice of democracy in this country.

Broadly, the rank order of levels of satisfaction agrees with the rank order that emerged when respondents were asked to look again at a list of the domains (being a housewife was excluded from this list) and asked: "Which three items on the list do you think are the *most important* for you personally in determining how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with your life in general these days?"

Table IV Three most important domains

	Percentage as voted	Importance order	Satisfaction order
Marriage	54	1	1
Family life	51	2	2
Health	44	3	4
Standard of living	38	4	8
House	33	5	7
Job	27	6	3
Spare time	14	7	6
District	13	8	4
Religion	13	9	10
Democracy	7	10	11
Education	5	11	9

Half of all the 'most important' votes went to three domains where respondents had said their levels of satisfaction were high or very high – their marriage, their family life, and their health.

However, there then came two domains – standard of living and housing – which respondents said played an important part in determining their overall satisfaction with their present life in general but where levels of satisfaction were below average.

Three of the domains – religion, democratic institutions and education received – were rated as of very little importance in determining the respondent's overall level of satisfaction with life; they received between them only 8 per cent of all 'three most important' votes; they were also the three domains with the lowest level of satisfaction with what is currently available. One possible explanation of this relationship is that in an attempt to adjust to what is realistically available many people write off as unimportant those areas of life which have yielded them disappointment and frustration.

<sup>7</sup>It is, of course, possible that respondents are unwilling to tell a stranger (i.e. the interviewer) that their marriage or family life is anything but highly satisfactory.

Towards the end of the interview each respondent was asked to take into account all the aspects of life that had been discussed and use the scale to indicate his satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his life as a whole (a) now, (b) where he would have put himself five years ago, (c) where he expected to be in five years' time, and (d) what he thought he was entitled to nowadays.

For the sample as a whole the mean current rating worked out at the high figure of 5.67 – over 60 per cent gave themselves a satisfaction rating of either 6 or 7.

This represented a 7 per cent increase on the average rating they gave themselves for five years ago (5.27). Expectations for five years hence were equally modest; the average future rating rose to 5.96 – a mere 5 per cent increase on present levels. More striking is the gap between levels of current satisfaction and what people feel they are entitled to; for the latter the mean rating was 6.34 (12 per cent above today's position), and 82 per cent of respondents felt they were entitled to a life where they could record a satisfaction level of either 6 or 7. In spite of their optimism about the future their 'entitlement' is well above where they expect to be in five years' time.

Table V Average overall levels of satisfaction

Now	5.67
5 years ago	5.27
5 years ahead	5.96
Present entitlement	6.34

Perhaps the most interesting finding of the survey was that the sample can be subdivided into two very different groups: the 54 per cent of all respondents who said that their present level of satisfaction was the same as what they thought they were entitled to, and the 21 per cent who said there was a shortfall of at least 2 points on what they had now and what they felt they were entitled to. This latter group (compared with the former) were particularly dissatisfied with their jobs, the education they had received, their standard of living, their leisure, and the quality of British democracy. Apparently it is in these areas that their sense of social inequity is mainly generated.

In a further attempt to arrive at overall general levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life the questionnaire used a semantic differential scale. Respondents were given a card showing 12 pairs of contrasting adjectives and asked to use the 7-point scale to indicate on each pair the appropriate point which best described their current feelings. In the list some pairs went from right to left in 'goodness' (e.g. enjoyable . . . miserable), while in others the sequence was reversed (e.g. unhappy . . . happy). In the following table the order has been made consistent,

the pairs are listed in descending order of 'goodness', and the scores have been telescoped to give four readings instead of seven.

Table VI Semantic differential view of present life (1 to 7 scale)

	Percentages					Mean
	Scale rate <sup>1</sup>					
	7	5, 6	3, 4	1, 2		
Happy.....Unhappy	47	42	9	2	6.0	
Worthwhile.....Useless	42	45	10	3	5.9	
Hopeful.....Discouraging	41	45	11	3	5.9	
Friendly.....Lonely	48	34	11	7	5.8	
Satisfying.....Unsatisfying	38	44	15	3	5.7	
Enjoyable.....Miserable	35	46	15	4	5.7	
Full.....Empty	40	41	14	5	5.7	
Rewarding.....Disappointing	32	49	15	4	5.6	
Interesting.....Boring	28	49	18	5	5.5	
Bring out best in me.....Doesn't etc.	23	41	26	10	5.0	
Free.....Tied down	34	27	23	16	5.0	
Easy.....Hard	18	27	36	19	4.4	

<sup>1</sup>Range of assessments: 7 represents a maximum positive reply.

If one looks merely at the mean scores the impression conveyed is of general high scores almost irrespective of the pairs of adjectives used; but if instead one concentrates on the proportions recording a score of 7 then significant differences emerge; substantial proportions describe their lives as happy, friendly and worthwhile, but only small minorities feel their conditions of life are easy, that they bring out the best in them, and that their lives are interesting.

In the following presentation of the findings the sequence of topics is that in which they occurred in the interview.

### Dwelling

Almost half (47 per cent) of all respondents lived in dwellings where the head of the household was an owner-occupier, and another two-fifths were council tenants.

	Percentages
Owner-occupiers	47.1
Council tenants	39.0
Private tenants	11.2
Rent-free etc.	2.7
	100.0

As a lead-in question respondents were asked: "What is the one thing you like best about your present dwelling?" One person in twelve replied either that there was nothing they liked about their accommodation, or that they could think of nothing. The replies of most respondents, however, were concentrated on four main aspects - roomy and spacious (16.5 per cent), compact/modern (15.5 per cent), immediate physical environment (13.7 per cent), and convenient position - near shops, schools etc. (13.5 per cent). The remaining one-third of replies was scattered widely and thinly over many attractions -

the garden, the central heating, the price of the kitchen, the neighbours, etc.

Owner-occupiers mentioned roomy/spacious convenient location more frequently than council tenants; the latter were less prone to mention these as outstanding attractions; on the other hand, they referred more frequently to the compact/modern attributes of dwellings.

Table VII Dwellings: One thing most liked

	Percentage		
	All	Owner-occupiers	Council tenants
Roomy/spacious	16.5	20	16
Compact/modern	15.5	13	20
Immediate environment	13.7	14	12
Convenient location	13.5	18	9
All other (inc. none)	40.8	35	43
	100.0	100	100

Respondents were then asked to reverse perspectives and to describe the one thing they would most like to change about their dwelling. Only a small minority, less than 20 per cent, there was nothing they would like to change. The three most common criticisms were that the dwelling needed specific improvements or alterations (walls damp, fewer stairs, larger kitchen etc), that it was awkward to manage (rooms spread over three floors, kitchen too far from dining room, solid fuel sheds at bottom of garden, etc), and that they needed more space (extra room etc).

Table VIII Dwellings: One thing most wished to change

	Percentage
Nothing	17.9
Needs specific alterations	25.2
Difficult to manage	17.9
Need more space	13.3
Lack of a basic amenity	9.5
Other	16.2
	100.0

After this review of the merits and demerits of their dwelling respondents were asked to use a 1 to 7 scale to indicate their overall level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the accommodation. The average rating was 5.4; average satisfaction ratings were given by those aged 45 or over and by owner-occupiers.

### Neighbourhood and local environment

Almost 40 per cent of respondents had lived in the district where they were interviewed for at least 20 years, and another 19 per cent for between 10 and 20 years. In short, a solid majority of those interviewed were speaking about their neighbourhood from long experience.

Respondents were shown cards which listed several aspects of local living conditions

asked to rate each of them in terms of the 1 to 7 satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale.

The highest single satisfaction score was given to the neighbours ("the sort of people who live around here"); then came a sequence of high scores for the services provided by the local authority; clearing of dustbins, street lighting, schools, provision of parks); well down the satisfaction scale came those aspects of the environment where responsibility is usually shared with an organisation larger than the local authority and which are a concomitant of big city life - noise, street traffic, public transport. On the whole fifteen aspects listed the range of satisfaction was considerable - from a high of 5.7 for "the sort of people who live round here" to a low of 4.1 for "the traffic in the streets"; the average score for the 15 items was 5.2, but when respondents were asked to summarise their attitudes and give an overall rating to the district in which they lived the figure was substantially higher at 5.7. This latter figure was also appreciably higher than the average score of 5.2 that emerged when respondents were asked "To what extent do you feel any especial attachment to this district as a place to live?" Approximately one-third of respondents feel a very high degree of attachment to their neighbourhoods; a little over one-third express a moderately high sense of attachment, while the mood of the remainder is one either of indifference or else complete detachment.

Table IX District: Satisfaction ratings of whole sample

	Mean	Percentages				
		Scale rate <sup>1</sup>				
		1, 2	3, 4	5, 6	7	
Neighbours	5.7	3	13	48	36	
Clearing dustbins	5.7	8	13	29	50	
Street lighting	5.7	7	12	35	46	
Local schools	5.6	4	14	48	34	
Shopping facilities	5.5	7	16	39	38	
Local police	5.5	9	18	39	36	
Provision of parks	5.4	10	17	34	39	
General appearance	5.4	5	16	54	24	
Clean air	5.3	9	15	49	27	
Proximity to family	5.3	12	15	40	33	
Litter-free streets	5.1	14	16	43	28	
Road repairs	4.6	16	26	42	16	
Noise	4.6	20	20	43	17	
Public transport	4.5	23	23	33	21	
Street traffic	4.1	24	28	34	13	
Average	5.2	11	17	41	31	
Attachment to district	5.2	12	18	38	34	
Overall satisfaction	5.7	3	8	59	29	

<sup>1</sup>Range of assessments: 1 represents low satisfaction: 7 represents high satisfaction.

The average score by the total sample of 5.7 points for overall satisfaction with the district held true for almost all sub-groups in the sample; the elderly were a little more satisfied than the young, and those with low household incomes slightly more satisfied than those with large incomes; the biggest gap appeared between those who scored low on the questionnaire's anomy

scale (5.9 district satisfaction rating) and those with a high anomy score (5.5 district satisfaction rating). The former it will be remembered are those expressing (through the scale) confidence in their fellow men.

### Democratic standards

Of all the domains studied the lowest level of satisfaction (4.67 points) was registered in reply to the question: "All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of democracy in Britain today?" Dissatisfaction was greatest among the young, among those who had finished their full-time schooling at the age of 18 or later, and among those with high scores on the anomy scale (i.e. distrustful of their fellows and cynical).

Before giving an overall rating on democracy, respondents were asked to use the 1 to 7 scale to rate Britain on each of six aspects of a democratic system. Here the range of assessments was very wide (1 represented an answer of 'not at all' and 7 stood for 'a very great deal'). Most people felt there is a great deal of freedom of speech in Britain today; at the other extreme most of them felt that voters have little influence on the way the country is run, and that is was difficult for people like themselves to understand what is going on in politics.

Table X How much democracy in Britain today

	Mean	Percentages				
		Scale rate <sup>1</sup>				
		1, 2	3, 4	5, 6	7	Don't know
Freedom of speech	5.7	5	14	43	37	1
How democratic is Britain	4.6	10	32	40	14	4
How tolerant to minorities	4.6	12	31	42	11	4
Effective local councillors	4.2	15	37	30	7	11
Understand politics	4.0	24	33	33	9	1
Voter influence	3.7	42	32	21	3	2

<sup>1</sup>Range of assessments: 1 represents 'not at all': 7 represents 'a very great deal'.

### Standard of living

Before using the 1 to 7 scale to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction overall with their standard of living respondents were questioned about their present ownership of some consumer goods and their hopes of acquiring them in the reasonably near future. The sequence of questions was:

Do you have.....?

If "no", Would you like one?

If you would, do you expect to get one in the next year or so?

Table XI Consumer goods

	Percentages			
	Yes	No, but would like	Don't have and don't want	Percentage of 'would like' who expect to get
Do you have—				
Car	56	21	23	27
Own garden	75	15	10	17
Colour television	9	46	45	20
Own telephone	49	30	21	24
Holiday abroad this year	14	42	44	22

Of the goods listed the most widely owned were a garden, a car, and a telephone.

Slightly less than half of those without a car would, in fact, like to have one; but of those without a garden and those without a telephone, 60 per cent in each case would, in fact, like to have these possessions. If their wishes were realised, 77 per cent of families would have a car, 79 per cent a telephone, and 90 per cent would have a private garden.

The two least widely enjoyed goods were a colour television (9 per cent), and a holiday abroad last year (14 per cent). For both these, half of those without them would in fact have liked them, so that, if these wishes had been realised, 56 per cent of all respondents would have had a holiday abroad last year, and 55 per cent would have colour television. Thus, within the limits of the items listed the most widely felt material deprivations are access to colour television and holidays abroad.

Respondents were asked: "Speaking generally, would you say that nowadays, your own standard of living is going up, going down, or remaining the same?". Those who said either that it was going up or going down were then asked to say whether the movement was a little or a lot.

The range of experience is apparently very wide: 12 per cent of the total sample say their standard of living is going up a lot, while 10 per cent feel their standard is going down a lot.

Table XII Changes in standard of living

	Percentages				
	Up a lot	Up a little	Same	Down a little	Down a lot
All respondents	12	26	37	15	10
Socio-economic grade:					
AB	9	42	39	10	—
C1	16	36	36	9	3
C2	19	24	34	19	4
DE	18	21	37	12	12
Age:					
16-29	19	32	37	10	2
30-44	13	34	30	13	10
45-59	9	24	40	17	10
60 and over	8	15	39	21	17

The most marked differences in replies were related to socio-economic grade and age. Among middle class respondents (AB and C1) slightly over half said their standard of living was going up either a lot or a little; in the working class groups the corresponding ratios amounted to little more than 40 per cent. Young people (aged 16 to 29) were much more ready than elderly people (aged 60 and over) to feel that their standard of living was going up; indeed among the latter nearly 40 per cent said their standard of living was going down.

To bring together respondents' views on this section they were asked once more to use the 1-7 scale and indicate their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their present standard of living. The mean score for the whole sample was a relatively low figure of 5.1. The only groups with average scores substantially above this were those with household incomes of £2,000 or more a year, those with large personal incomes, and those with low scores on the anomaly scale. Particularly dissatisfied with their standard of living were those with small household incomes, those in the unskilled working class (DE grade), and, above all, those with high anomaly scores.

All respondents, except the 18 per cent who rate their standard of living at 7 (i.e. completely satisfied) were asked: "How much extra money would you say you need to come in each week in order to live without money worries and in comfort?"

Table XIII Extra money needed by degree of satisfaction with present standard of living

	Degree of present satisfaction <sup>1</sup>			Percent
	1, 2 and 3	4 and 5	6	
Extra needed:				
Up to £3.99	8	20	31	
£4 to £5.99	26	29	37	
£6 to £7.99	10	6	2	
£8 to £9.99	5	7	2	
£10 to £14.99	26	21	18	
£15 or more	25	17	10	
	100	100	100	
Approximate median (£)	10	6	5	

<sup>1</sup> Range of assessments: 1 represents low satisfaction; 6 represents satisfaction.

The extra median sum needed by this 82 per cent of the total sample to enable them to live in comfort and without any money worries was under £5, but as a guide to the wishes of the respondents this figure is not very meaningful; while 52 per cent of them would have been satisfied with an extra £6, another 38 per cent felt they require at least an extra £10 a week to reach the standard of comfort they had set themselves. These high flyers were relatively most frequent among the small minority who expressed a low level of satisfaction with their actual standard of living, they were also to be found among those who gave their current standard a 5 or 6 rating on the 7 point scale.

An analysis by household income of the replies to the 82 per cent scoring less than 7 on the standard of living scale indicates that respondents from the poorest households felt that an addition of slightly less than £4 a week would have solved all their material problems; these were, for the most part, families mainly dependent on old age pensions as their main source of income. As income rose, the amount of extra money needed also rose, so

those in the richest households (£2,500 per annum or more) felt for the most part that at least another £650 per annum would be necessary to enable them to cope with their monetary troubles.

Table XIV Extra money needed by present household income per annum

	Present household income (£):					Percentages
	450-650	850-1,050	1,250-1,450	1,650-2,000	2,500 and over	All
Extra needed:						
Up to £3.99	52	10	9	15	18	21
£4 to £5.99	30	44	37	31	8	31
£6 to £7.99	4	13	6	2	2	5
£8 to £9.99	1	7	5	8	7	5
£10 to £14.99	9	19	28	26	28	21
£15 or more	4	7	15	18	37	17
	100	100	100	100	100	100
Approximate weekly median (£)	4	6	8	9	12½	6

Almost as extreme (in absolute amounts) were the differences related to age. In all age groups up to 45, respondents, on average, felt that £10 a week would be necessary to solve their problems. From that point on estimates fell rapidly until those in their sixties and seventies were usually of the opinion that an extra £4 a week would suffice to remove their money worries and provide them with all the comforts they needed.

Table XV Extra money needed by respondent's age

	Age group:				Percentages
	16-29	30-44	45-59	60 and over	
Extra needed:					
Up to £3.99	14	12	14	48	
£4 to £5.99	21	28	43	31	
£6 to £7.99	6	2	8	5	
£8 to £9.99	10	8	3	—	
£10 to £14.99	23	32	16	12	
£15 and over	26	18	16	4	
	100	100	100	100	
Approximate weekly median (£)	10	10	5½	4	

## Job

Of the total sample 40 per cent were working for pay full-time and 11 per cent were part-time workers. Most of the others were either housewives or retired from work.

Housewives in the sample (numbering 182) were asked to use the 1 to 7 scale to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied they were overall with being a housewife. As a group they registered a high mean figure of 5.7; over two-thirds of them gave scores of either 6 (26 per cent) or 7 (42 per cent). Particularly high levels of satisfaction were re-

corded by older housewives, by those with minimal schooling and by those with low anxiety scores.

The remainder of this section of the interview was concerned with the 303 respondents who were either full-time (78 per cent) or part-time (22 per cent) working for pay. In terms of broad occupational status their composition was:

	Percentages
Senior managerial or professional	14
Other white-collar posts	29
Skilled manual	22
Other manual	35
	100

Over 90 per cent of them were employees; the remaining 9 per cent were self-employed. One-third of them had been working for the same firm for at least 10 years, and another 20 per cent had remained with the same employer for between 5 and 10 years. At the other extreme there were 28 per cent who had been with their present employer for less than 2 years; these were almost entirely either young people who were recent recruits to the work force, or else women in part-time jobs.

Before asking the 308 working respondents to give an overall assessment of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs they were taken through a list of 16 circumstances related to work and asked to say for each how far each held true for their own particular job. Again they used the 1 to 7 scale, with 1 indicating 'completely false' and 7 signifying 'completely true'.

The range of mean scores on this list of 16 true/false aspects of work was very wide. Broadly, the scores fell into three groups:

*Completely or almost completely true.* These were attributes of the job largely related to interpersonal relationships - e.g. relations with supervisor, with work-mates, and with employer.

*High 'true' scores, but some criticism.* These were typically on such attributes of job security, pay, pace of work, etc.

*Low scores, i.e. widespread criticism.* Here substantial proportions of respondents indicated that their jobs gave them few opportunities to use or develop their special abilities, that the physical surroundings in which they worked were unpleasant, that the general public had little respect for the sort of work done by the respondent, and, most decisively, that chances of promotion were very poor.

Between the four occupational groups there are some striking differences (it should be remembered that the DE grade includes a more than average proportion of women workers and part-timers). Thus for AB grade respondents there is, as com-

