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**Measuring subjective well-being:
an opportunity for National Statistical Offices?**

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**Background paper on
Subjective Measurement of Well-Being
In the Israeli Social Survey**

LHBEN

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Subjective Measurement of Well-Being in the Israeli Social Survey

BACKGROUND

The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS) Social Survey has been conducted annually since 2002 on a sample of about 7,500 persons aged 20 and over, who represent about 4.5 million people in that age bracket.

The main purpose of the Social Survey is to provide up-to-date information on the welfare of Israelis and on their living conditions. The information provided by the survey is used by social policy makers, by social researchers and by the general public. The social survey questionnaire has two main parts: a core questionnaire containing about 100 items covering the main areas of life such as:

- Details of household members
- Fertility
- Dwelling
- Ownership of automobile
- Household help
- Religion
- Employment
- Economic situation
- Skills: studies, languages, courses, use of computers and the internet, army service and driving license
- Relations with family and friends
- Volunteering
- Victimization
- Subjective attitudes on well-being and standard of living regarding health, housing, region, economic situation and satisfaction in general.

Each year there is a different variable module devoted to one or two topics, in order to investigate it in greater detail than is possible in the core questionnaire.

The annual variable module

(See Appendix – Selection of questions concerning subjective values of wellbeing)

2002 - Pensions coverage and retirement saving

2003 - Multidimensional measurement of welfare

2004 - Non-compulsory educational frameworks for children (aged 0-13), and their connection with parents' employment

2005 - Participation in Labour Force and attitudes on employment

2006 - Unpaid Caregivers and attitudes about caring for people with functional difficulties

2007 – Two topics: Welfare and Satisfaction with government services

2008 – Social Mobility

2009 - Two topics: Family Relations and Religious Observance

2010 - Two topics: Health and way of life and Use of technology

2011 - Two topics: Studies during lifetime and Use of language

The survey population

The survey population comprises the permanent non-institutional population of Israel aged 20 and older, as well as residents of non-custodial institutions (such as student dormitories, immigrant absorption centers and independent living projects for the elderly). New immigrants are included in the survey population if they have been present in Israel for at least six months.

Groups not included in the survey population: residents of custodial institutions (e.g. old-age homes, hospitals for the chronically ill, prisons), Israelis abroad for more than a year without interruption at the time of the survey, diplomats, new immigrants who arrived fewer than six months prior to the interview, Bedouin and other persons living outside the boundaries of localities.

Fieldwork

Questionnaires are administered by ICBS interviewers using laptops to conduct computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) based on Blaise software developed by Statistics Netherlands. The interviews are conducted in Hebrew, Arabic and Russian. Fieldwork for each wave begins in January and ends in December. An interview lasts about an hour.

Results of Field Work 2008

		Absolute numbers	Percentages
Total sampled		9,389	100.0
Included		8,899	94.8
Excluded		490	5.2
Thereof:	Deceased	113	1.2
	Abroad for over a year	236	2.5
	Institution	85	0.9
	Other (living outside of localities)	56	0.6
Responded		7,327	78.0
Did not respond		1,572	16.7
Thereof:	Absent	309	3.3
	Temporary difficulty	116	1.2
	Refusal	358	3.8
	Language difficulty	92	1.0
	Located but not interviewed (handicapped)	178	1.9
	Not located	485	5.2
	Not sent to the field	34	0.4

Sampling method

The desired final sample size was 7,500 persons aged 20 and older. The first stage of sample design involved defining groups based on a combination of three demographic variables: five population groups (Arabs in East Jerusalem, outside East Jerusalem, immigrants who arrived in 1990 or later; immigrants who arrived by 1989; Israeli-born Jews); seven age groups (20-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75+); men and women – a total of 70 design groups. The expected size of each design group was to be proportional to its size in the population, under the constraint of a final total sample size of 7,500 completed interviews. On the basis of assumptions regarding the expected proportion of non-response and of those not part of the survey population in each of the design groups it was possible to compute the required sample size for each design group. The final sampling probability for each person varies by design group and reflects a-priori assumptions regarding the proportion of non-response for each group. The

average sampling probability was 1:510, the maximum sampling probability was 1:386, and the minimal sampling probability was 1:606.

Persons listed in localities from which it was expected to obtain sample sizes of at least 15 persons (i.e., whose population of persons aged 20 or older was at least 7,650) were sampled in a single-stage stratified sample, with each design group comprising a stratum. A systematic random sample of persons with a uniform probability was drawn from each stratum after it was arranged according to the geographic characteristics of the localities it contained.

Altogether, about 84% of the sample was drawn in single-stage sampling.

Because of practical constraints, localities having fewer than 7,650 listed residents aged 20 or older were sampled in a two-stage procedure. In the first stage localities were divided into strata according to region, and a sample of localities was drawn proportionate to locality size. In the second stage the persons were sorted into the 70 design groups and a systematic random sample of persons was drawn from the sampled localities. The second stage sampling probability was set such that the overall sampling probability (the product of the probabilities in each stage) would be constant. This method provided the minimum required number of 15 persons per locality.

At the end of 2008 a supplementary sample was drawn of immigrants who arrived starting in April, 2008, but were not included in the main sampling frame.

The initial sample included 9,340 persons in order to obtain 7,500 respondents.

Selection of main findings of 2007 Social Survey

More than half of the population aged 20 years and over (53%) are satisfied with their economic situation, yet 46% cannot cover their monthly expenses, and 40% who need dental care had to forego the treatment due to financial difficulties. In spite of this, in the year of 2007 there is an improvement in satisfaction with income and financial situation compared to 2003.

Evaluation of personal economic situation

53% of persons aged 20 and over are satisfied with their economic situation. Men are more satisfied than women (56% versus 51%), Jews more than Arabs (56% versus 43%), academics (64%) more than non-academics (52%).

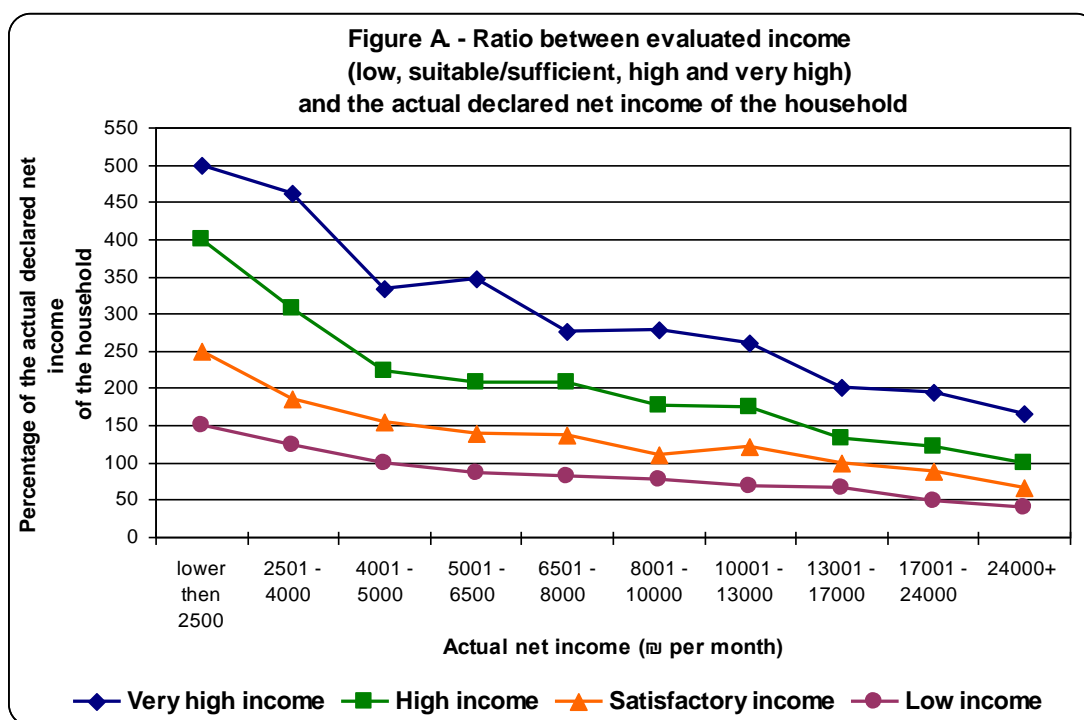
13% of persons aged 20 and over felt they were poor during the last year. More immigrants who arrived in 1990 and later (18%) felt poor than Israeli born (12%). 24% of people living in households with a low per capita income (under 2000₪) felt poor. A quarter (25%) of Arabs felt they were poor versus 11% of Jews. 16% of all persons aged 20-29 felt poor versus 9% aged 70 and over.

55% of employees aged 20 and over are satisfied with their income from work. Men are more satisfied with their income from work than women (60% versus 50%) and Israel born more than immigrants who arrived in 1990 and later (58% versus 42%). 58% of Arab employees are satisfied with their income from work versus 55% of Jews.

In 2007 participants of the survey were asked to relate to the net monthly income of their household and were asked what is low income, suitable/sufficient income, high income and very high income for their household. This question, which is called in professional literature¹ "the question of subjective poverty", gives us information on the connection between the demands and expectations of participants and their actual income.

Figure A displays the evaluation of the public as shown by answers to the above question, as the percentage of the actual declared net income of their household.

¹ Source: Bernard M.S. Van Praag & Ada Ferrer-I-carbonell, Happiness Quantified "Subjective Income Inequalities" Oxford University Press, New York, 2004.



As the actual income of the household grows, the relation between income perceived as low/satisfactory/high/very high and the actual net income of the household drops gradually. The data show that households with actual net income lower than 5000₪ per month perceive their economic situation as low, because the satisfactory income for them is higher by tens or hundreds per cent than their actual income. On the other hand, households on the other end (over 17,000₪ monthly), perceive satisfactory income as lower than their actual income, and the upper limit of their expectations stands on income double their actual income.

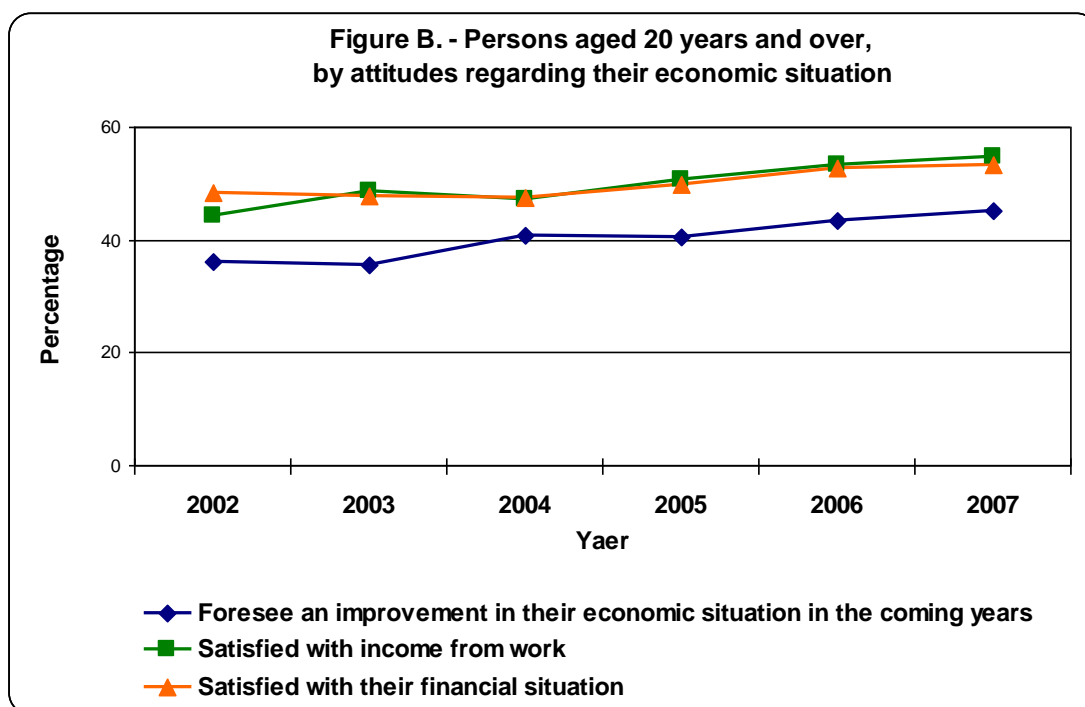
47% of persons aged 20 and over declared that they are unable to cover all the expenses of their household. 69% of those living in households with monthly gross per capita incomes of 2,000₪ were not able to cover their household expenses. 67% of Arabs declared that they are unable to cover all their household expenses, versus 44% of Jews. 42% of employees are unable to cover all their household expenses versus 59% of unemployed.

In 2007, 24% of persons aged 20 and over declared that during the last 5 years their financial situation deteriorated: 27% of Arabs, 26% of immigrants of 1990 and later, 30% who studied without diploma and 35% of the divorced.

The evaluation of changes in the personal economic situation in the coming years

45% of persons aged 20 and over estimated that their economic situation will improve in the coming years, 12% estimated that their economic situation will get worse in the coming years and 33% estimated there will be no change. The percentage of those estimating their economic situation will improve is higher in the Arab population than in the Jewish population (51% versus 44%). The unemployed foresee improvement in their economic situation more than the employed: 64% versus 50%.

The results of the 2002-2007 social surveys show a moderate rise in the percentage of those aged 20 and above who foresee an improvement in their economic situation in the coming years: 40% in 2005, 43% in 2006 and 44% in 2007 (not including East Jerusalem).



Evaluation of the economic situation of the family in which they grew up

Persons who evaluated the economic situation of the family in which they grew up as "not good at all" are more satisfied with their economic situation, academics (62% "satisfied" or "very satisfied"), versus non-academics (43% "satisfied" or "very satisfied"). These findings testify that the socio-economic inter-generational mobility in Israel is closely tied to education.

(Percentage)

	Non-academics		Academics	
	Economic situation of the family in which they grew up		Economic situation of the family in which they grew up	
Satisfaction with economic situation	"Not so good" or "Not good at all"	"Good" or "Vary good"	"Not so good" or "Not good at all"	"Good" or "Very good"
"Satisfied" or "very satisfied"	43.9	54.1	60.8	65.6
"Not so satisfied" or "not satisfied at all"	56.5	45.7	38.9	33.9

Foregoing because of economic difficulties

Food

21% of persons aged 20 and over declared that they have foregone food last year due to financial difficulties. In households in which nobody works 22% have foregone food versus 9% in households with two workers. 50% of Arabs have foregone food versus 15% of Jews. 31% of Jews who declared they were ultra-orthodox have foregone food because of financial difficulties, 19% of the observant and 9% of the non-religious Jews.

Heating and Cooling of the house

36% of persons aged 20 and over have foregone adequate heating or cooling of their homes: 65% of the Arabs versus 29% of the Jews, 44% of immigrants of 1990 or later versus 32% of Israeli born. 46% of Jews who declared themselves ultra-orthodox have foregone adequate heating last year, 31% of the religious and 21% of non-religious. 60% of those who live in households with a gross monthly per capita income up to 2000 ₪ have foregone adequate heating or cooling of their homes versus 10% of those living in households with a gross monthly per capita income of 4000 ₪.

Prescription Drugs

Some 68% of persons aged 20 and over needed prescription drugs last year, but 16% of them have foregone buying them because of financial difficulties. In households with no one working, 27% have foregone medicines versus 8% in households with two workers. The percentage of those foregoing prescription drugs is higher amongst the Arabs than the Jews (43% versus 11%). 33% living in households with a gross per capita monthly income up to 2,000 ₪ have foregone prescription drugs versus 3% in households with a gross monthly per capita income of over 4,000 ₪. Persons defining their medical

condition as "not good" have foregone prescription drugs more than those defining their medical condition as "good" 31% versus 10%.

Dental treatment

61% of persons aged 20 and over needed dental treatment last year and 40% have foregone it because of financial difficulties. The rate amongst the Arabs is 68%, whilst amongst the Jews it is 36%, 63% of unemployed versus 33% of the employed. 64% living in households with a gross monthly per capita income up to 2,000 ₪ have foregone dental treatment versus 14% of those living in households with a gross monthly per capita income of over 4,000 ₪.

Medical treatment

52% of persons aged 20 and over needed medical treatment last year and 17% have foregone it because of financial difficulties. The rate amongst the Arabs is double (31%) than amongst the Jews (14%). 17% of persons living in households with nobody working versus 11% in households with two workers.

Supplementary Medical Insurance

24% of persons aged 20 and over in Israel do not have supplementary medical insurance. 53% have foregone supplementary medical insurance because of financial difficulties. 19% of Jews do not have supplementary medical insurance and 63% of Arabs. 29% of Jews defining themselves as ultra-orthodox do not have supplementary medical insurance, 19% of the religious and 16% of the non-religious. 38% of immigrants of 1990 and later have no supplementary medical insurance versus 23% of Israeli born. 32% of those who define their medical condition "not good" have no supplementary medical insurance versus 22% of those who define their medical condition "good". 39% of persons who live in households with a gross per capita income of 2,000 ₪ have no supplementary medical insurance, versus 8% of persons who live in households with a gross per capita income of 4,000 ₪.

Telephone and Electricity

13% of persons aged 20 and over in Israel had their telephone or electricity disconnected last year: 35% of Arabs and 9% of Jews, 26% who live in households with a gross per capita income of 2,000 ₪ versus 2% who live in households with a gross per capita income of 4,000 ₪.

Appendix

Questions concerning subjective values of wellbeing

Included a choice of questions asked in the Social Survey on subjective attitudes regarding individual welfare.

Attitudes regarding dwelling

Are you satisfied, in general, with the area in which you live?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

Are you satisfied with the amount of parks, public gardens or greenery in the area in which you live?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

Are you satisfied with the cleanliness of the area in which you live?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

Are you satisfied with the level of clean air in the area where you reside?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

Are you satisfied with the number of garbage containers in the area where you reside?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

Are you satisfied with the amount of parking spaces in the area where you reside?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

In general, are you satisfied with the state of the roads in the area where you reside? e.g., width of streets and sidewalks, lighting, signposting?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*

Are you satisfied, in general, with the dwelling you live in?

1. *Very satisfied.*
2. *Satisfied.*
3. *Not so satisfied.*
4. *Not satisfied at all.*

Are you satisfied with your relations with your neighbors?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not so satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*
5. *[Have no neighbours]*

Are you satisfied with the size of the dwelling?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *No satisfied and not unsatisfied*
4. *Not so satisfied*
5. *Not satisfied at all*

Health and daily functioning:

How is your health, overall?

1. *Very good*
2. *Good*
3. *Not so good*
4. *Not good at all*

Do you have any physical or health problem (that has lasted six months or more)?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Does this problem interfere with your day-to-day functioning?

1. *Greatly interferes*
2. *Interferes*
3. *Doesn't interfere so much*
4. *Doesn't interfere at all*

Relations with family and friends

Are you satisfied with your relationships with family members?

1. *Very satisfied*
2. *Satisfied*
3. *Not very satisfied*
4. *Not satisfied at all*
5. *[Has no family]*

Do you have friends you meet or talk to on the phone (including fax and email)?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

How often do you meet these friends, or talk to them on the phone?

1. Daily, or almost daily
2. Once or twice a week
3. Once or twice a month
4. Less than once a month

Are you content about your relationships with friends?

1. Not at all content
2. Not very content
3. Content
4. Very content

Do you ever feel lonely?

1. Frequently
2. Sometimes
3. Seldom
4. Never

If you were in trouble, are there people whose help you could count on?

1. Yes
2. No

Satisfaction in general

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Not very satisfied
4. Not satisfied at all

In the near future, do you think that compared to today, your life will be:

1. Better
2. Unchanged
3. Worse

How satisfied are you with your economic situation?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Not so satisfied
4. Not satisfied at all

In the near future, do you think that compared to today, your financial state will be:

1. Better
2. Unchanged
3. Worse

People decide what a high income and a low income are, according to their needs and expectations. I will now ask you questions regarding the net monthly income of your household.

For your household, what is a low income? (In shekels) Less than ____ NIS

What is a suitable or satisfactory income? _____ NIS

What is a high income? _____ NIS

What is a very high income? More than ____ NIS

Financial situation at various periods of time

Since the age of 15 were there periods in which you thought that you were poor?

1. *Often*
2. *Sometimes, occasionally*
3. *Seldom*
4. *Never*

When was the last time you thought you were poor?

1. *During the past year*
2. *Before one to five years*
3. *Before five years or more*

If you compare your financial state today to that of five years ago, has your financial state:

1. *Improved greatly*
2. *Improved*
3. *Not changed*
4. *Become worse*
5. *Become much worse*

If you compare your income from work to the income of people your age, with a similar educational level, is your income:

1. *Much higher*
2. *Higher*
3. *Approximately the same*
4. *Lower*
5. *Much lower*

The following questions refer to consumption of goods and services during the last 12 months, from the month of ____ to the end of last month.

During the last 12 months, have you needed medical treatment, not including dental treatment?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Did you forego medical treatment due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In the last 12 months, have you needed dental treatment?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Did you forego dental treatment due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In the last 12 months, have you needed prescription medicines?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Did you forego prescription medicines due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In addition to state health insurance, do you have supplementary health insurance from a sick fund or from an insurance company?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Do you not have supplementary or other health insurance due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In the last 12 months, did you forego adequately heating or cooling your home, due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In the last 12 months, has the telephone or electricity in your home been disconnected, due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In the last 12 months, did you forego food due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Do you smoke (at least one cigarette a day)?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

In the last 12 months, did you forego buying cigarettes due to financial difficulties?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

When you were 15, what was your family's financial state:

1. *Very good*
2. *Good*
3. *Not so good*
4. *Not good at all*

If you compare your financial state today to that of your family's when you were 15, is your financial state:

1. *Much better*
2. *Better*
3. *Approximately similar*
4. *Worse*
5. *Much worse*

In the last 12 months, have you felt under pressure?

1. *Always, often*
2. *Sometimes, occasionally*
3. *Seldom*
4. *Never*

In the last 12 months, have you felt depressed?

1. *Always, often*
2. *Sometimes, occasionally*
3. *Seldom*
4. *Never*

Have you felt you could cope with your problems?

1. *Always, often*
2. *Sometimes, occasionally*
3. *Seldom*
4. *Never*

In the last 12 months, have you felt full of energy?

1. *Always, often*
2. *Sometimes, occasionally*
3. *Seldom*
4. *Never*

Have worries disturbed your sleep?

1. *Always, often*
2. *Sometimes, occasionally*
3. *Seldom*
4. *Never*

The following questions relate to all members of the household. Do you manage to cover all your monthly household expenses for food, electricity, telephone, etc.?

1. *Yes, without any difficulty.*
2. *Yes, [but with some difficulty].*
3. *No, not so well*
4. *No, not at all*