UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A HOUSEHOLD -BASED DEVELOPMENT INDEX APPROACH

BY

EDWARD KIRONJI

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A HOUSEHOLD -BASED DEVELOPMENT INDEX APPROACH

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STUDENT: EDWARD KIRONJI

SUPERVISOR: PROF. J.L. VAN TONDER

This study commences with an overview of the concept "quality of life" as perceived from a developmental point of view. The study focuses on the current measures of the improvements in quality of life which operate at different measurement levels. Most of the measures are economic in nature like household income and income per capita, gross domestic product (GDP) and Gross national product (GNP) (Todaro, 1997). Other quantitative measures considered by the current study include measures of wealth particularly the Living standards measurement (LSM) by the South African advertising and research foundation (SAARF), Consumer confidence index (CCI), Index of economic well-being and the Human Development index (HDI) among others (Hagerty *et al*., 2001). A household-based measure using nominal level data, the LSM in particular tracks improvements in household wealth (as opposed to household income) through changes in household possession of durable items. Subjective measures of quality of life and changes in life satisfaction are looked at by the current study, including studies by Erikson (1993), Moller (1987, 1996, 1997) and, the wellbeing measures by Diener and Suh (1997) amongst others.

Quality of life however, is not just about money as economics might have it portrayed. It is not just about how individuals feel because, according to Diener and Suh (1997), feelings are in most cases a response to external influences. Quality of life is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon which needs to be viewed holistically. As a result this study embarked on developing a measure of quality of life (a quality of life index) using household data pertaining to socio-economic aspects. The level of measurement for the data is ordinal. Operatinalised at household level, the measure was intended to

analyse changes in household quality of life (QOL) between 1996 and 1999. Data for October household surveys for the period 1999-1996 was used in the study.
The analysis focused on changes in household access to selected indicators of quality of life. The study applied cluster analysis to group households accessing similar QOL indicators into QOL groups. Identifying the indicator or indicators which differentiate the QOL conditions among QOL groups was achieved through the use of discriminant function analysis. The entire array of QOL groups or clusters from a particular set of data (OHS 1996-OHS1999) constituted the QOL index.

The main findings of this study are that broadly, there has been an improvement in household quality of life (QOL), basing on the developed measure of quality of life. This is revealed by an increase in the number of clusters of households or QOL groups from five in 1996 to eight in 1999. The study attributes the increase in QOL groups to an increase in households' ability to access the selected QOL indicators. In spite of the increase in the number of QOL clusters, the study finds that proportionally fewer households are found in the QOL groups with better material living conditions (i.e. measurable QOL) than otherwise. This is contrary to the expected pattern in development terms based on empirical evidence in South Africa (see SAARF, 2002; SAARF, 2004; Stats SA, 1996; Stats SA, 2001; Stats SA, 2004). The study also finds that female headed households are generally predominant in groups with poor QOL. Discriminant function analysis results highlight *access to toilet*, *refuse disposal services* and *water source* as discriminant indicators in addition to *Highest level of education completed by a household head* and, *Employment status of household head, among others.* The latter consistently differentiate between groups of households throughout the reference period except in 1999.

Findings relating to the influence of household material conditions on perceived quality of life show that proportionately more households in groups with the better access to the selected QOL indicators being satisfied with life than otherwise. A point worthy noting is the consistency in the proportions of households which felt that things had not changed after all, irrespective of the groups' ranks, throughout the reference period.

The key conclusion drawn from these findings is that low levels of education and employment status among household heads strongly influence household quality of life. These two indicators have been found to consistently differentiate the QOL conditions among the QOL groups that emerged. Groups on the poor side of the QOL index are characterized by high unemployment, illiteracy and dysfunctional levels of education for most household heads therein. Most households belonging to the poorest QOL groups are rural-based (found in Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Kwazulu Natal and Mpumalnga), with poor access to basic services identified under discriminant function analysis. The situation is likely to be complicated by the existence of substantial proportions of households headed by people aged 15-19 identified in this study. This needs to be taken seriously particularly in the current era of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (see HSRC, 2002; Rosa, 2003). The study's findings have revealed that poor QOL among households is not related to the sex of the household head. Although female headed households are predominant in groups of households with poor QOL conditions, adjacent to such groups are households in groups with almost equally poor living conditions the majority of which are males-headed. What is needed therefore is a holistic focus on the factors that impede households' ability to sustain better living conditions.

Most of the study's recommendations reinforce initiatives which are being undertaken in the development agenda. For instance the need to improve people's level of education does not need any more emphasis given the study's results. Sustaining improved household QOL will require households to have a capability of meeting their needs. Successful completion of education – tertiary as opposed to functional literacy- opens channels for households to lead a better life. Achieving this level of education requires time, which from a demographic point of view, most of the currently uneducated household heads may not have. While much has been done in enabling households to access basic services like housing, electricity and water, payment for such services remains the responsibility of individual households. Inability to pay for services – due to unemployment and lack of education-will just perpetuate household dependency on social grants.

It is also recommended that in-depth qualitative studies be undertaken to establish the apparent consistent gap between objective living conditions and subjective life satisfaction among households if realistic policy objectives are to be achieved.

The study recommends a further application of the formulated QOL index particularly on current data with similar indicators. A more rigorous thinking around the weighting of individual QOL indicators will iron out the inconsistencies observed in the study's results. This will provide an opportunity to standardise the indicators, update the results of the QOL index while enhancing triangulation at the same time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
	CHAPTER ONE	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	The background	1
1.3	The problem statement	4
1.4	Aims of study and research questions	6
1.5	Operationalisation, assumptions, and delimitations	7
1.6	Contribution of the study	13
1.7	Outline of the study	13
1.8	Summary	15
	CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	
2.1	Introduction	16
2.2	Qualitative measures of quality of life: A composite index of subjective "global" measure of quality of life	16
2.3	Qualitative measures of quality of life: Components of life satisfaction within South Africa's population categories	17
2.4	Qualitative measures of quality of life: Household satisfaction - Past, present and future perspectives	19
2.5	Quantitative measures of quality of life: The SAARF Universal Living Standards Measure	21
2.6	Descriptions of inequality; The Swedish approach to welfare research	29
2.7	Basic needs and the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI)	32
2.8	Measuring quality of life: Economic, Social, and Subjective indicators	33
2.8.1	Objective or Social indicators	34
2.8.2	Subjective well – being (SWB) indicators	36
2.9	Quality of life and national policy	39
2.9.1	The Consumer confidence index (CCI)	40
2.9.2	The Index of economic well being (IEWB)	41
2.9.3	Miringoff's Index of social health	42
2.9.4	The Human Development Index (HDI	43
2.10	Housing, electricity supply, water and sanitation	45
2.11	Access to sanitation	48
2.12	Health services	48

2.13	Human development and quality of life	49
2.14	Household fertility and development	52
2.15	Household-based development index and quality of life	54
2.16	Aspects of the quality of life in black townships in a South African-city: implications for human development	55
2.17	Summary	57
	CHAPTER THREE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HOUSEHOLD – BASED MEASURE OF QUALITY OF LIFE	58
3.1	Introduction	58
3.2	Conceptualisation of quality of life	58
3.2.1	Conceptualising the model: questions informing the conceptualisation of –quality of life	60
3.2.2	The link between female education and quality of life	61
3.2.3	Conceptualising the model: Social status and-quality of life	63
3.2.4	Conceptualising the model: lifestyles and quality of life	66
3.2.5	Conceptualising the model: poverty and quality of life	68
3.3	The conceptual model	71
3.4	The research methodology	74
3.4.1	Introduction	74
3.4.2	Data sources	75
3.4.3	Sample size	75
3.4.4	The instrument and its design	76
3.4.5	The relevant indicators	76
3.4.6	Overview of data analysis	79
3.4.7	Ordinal level data analysis	81
3.4.8	Cluster analysis	82
3.4.9	Discriminant function analysis	86
3.4.10	Interpretation of study findings	90
3.4.11	The quality of life index	96
3.4.12	Summary	97
	CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY (OHS 1999)	99
4.1	Introduction	99
4.2	Applying discriminant function analysis to the OHS (1999) data	99

4.2.1	Prediction of group membership	104
4.2.2	Interpretation of discriminant function results	105
4.3	Formation of the quality of life groups using cluster analysis	109
4.4	Comparing the different aspects of the eight quality of life	110
4.4.1	Analysis of demographics (OHS 1999)	113
4.4.2	Analysis of residence (type of dwelling)	123
4.4.3	Analysis of fuel used by households	128
4.4.4	Analysis of sanitation	132
4.4.5	Analysis of households' water source	137
4.4.6	Analysis of durables	141
4.4.7	Subjective evaluation of quality of life	146
4.5	Summary	148
	CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY (OHS 1998)	150
5.1	Introduction	150
5.2	Applying discriminant function analysis to the data	151
5.2.1	Interpretation of discriminant function results	153
5.2.2	Prediction of group membership	155
5.3	Formation of the quality of life groups using cluster analysis	158
5.4	Comparing the different aspects of the eight quality of life	159
5.4.1	Analysis of demographics OHS (1998)	162
5.4.2	Analysis of residence (type of dwelling)	171
5.4.3	Analysis of fuel used by households	176
5.4.4	Analysis of sanitation	179
5.4.5	Analysis of households' water source	183
5.4.6	Analysis of durables	188
5.4.7	Subjective evaluation of Quality Of Life	193
5.5	Summary	195
	CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY (OHS 1997)	197
6.1	Introduction	197
6.2	Applying discriminant function analysis to the data	198
6.2.1	Interpretation of discriminant function results	200
6.2.2	Prediction of group membership	202

6.3	Formation of the quality of life groups using cluster analysis	204
6.4	Comparing the different aspects of the eight quality of life	205
6.4.1	Analysis of demographics OHS (1997)	208
6.4.2	Analysis of residence (type of dwelling)	218
6.4.3	Analysis of fuel used by households	223
6.4.4	Analysis of households' water source	226
6.4.5	Analysis of sanitation	231
6.4.6	Analysis of durables	235
6.4.7	Subjective evaluation of quality of life	241
6.5	Summary	243
	CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY (OHS 1996)	245
7.1	Introduction	245
7.2	Applying discriminant function analysis to the data	246
7.2.1	Interpretation of discriminant function results	248
7.2.2	Prediction of group membership	250
7.3	Formation of the quality of life groups using cluster analysis	253
7.4	Comparing the different aspects of the five quality of life groups	254
7.4.1	Analysis of demographics OHS (1996)	257
7.4.2	Analysis of residence (type of dwelling)	265
7.4.3	Analysis of fuel used by households	268
7.4.4	Analysis of sanitation	271
7.4.5	Analysis of households' water source	274
7.4.6	Analysis of durables	278
7.4.7	Subjective evaluation of Quality Of Life	282
7.5	Summary	284
	CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	286
8.1	Introduction	286
8.2	Summary of findings	286
8.3	Discussion of findings in respect of age and sex distribution of household heads	287
8.4	Discussion of findings in respect of cluster analysis and the QOL index	293
8.5	Discussion of findings in respect of perceived quality of life	305

8.6	Discussion of findings in respect of the indicators differentiating between quality of life groups – disriminant analysis	312
8.7	Summary	321
	CHAPTER NINE: OVERVIEW, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITAIONS	323
9.1	Introduction	323
9.2	Conclusions arising from the analysis and interpretation of the research findings	324
9.3	Recommendations emanating from the analysis and interpretation of the research findings	327
9.4	Problems and limitations of the study	330
9.5	Summary	333
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	334
	Appendices	341
Appendix A	Components of the indicators of quality of quality of life	341
Appendix B	Cluster analysis results for OHS 1999	347
Appendix C	Discriminant analysis results for OHS 1999	351
Appendix D	Cluster analysis results for OHS 1998	364
Appendix E	Discriminant analysis results for OHS 1998	367
Appendix F	Cluster analysis results for OHS 1997	376
Appendix G	Discriminant analysis results for OHS 1997	378
Appendix H	Cluster analysis results for OHS 1996	389
Appendix I	Discriminant analysis results for OHS 1996	391
Appendix J	October household survey 1999: Metadata	399

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	Variables used in the new SAARF universal LSM and results of-stepwise regression analysis	24
Table 2.2:	Summary findings in respect of population distribution, average household income and gender profile	29
Table 2.3:	Components and some typical indicators in the Swedish level of living surveys	31
Table 2.4:	Countries suffering setbacks in the human development index-1999	51
Table 3.1:	Sample sizes and number of cases for OHS 1996-1999	76
Table 3.2:	Anatomy of discriminant function results	91
Table 4.1:	Summary of canonical discriminant functions (OHS 1999)	101
Table 4.2:	Statistical significance of discriminant functions (OHS 1999)	102
Table 4.3:	Pooled within-groups correlations between the standardized canonical discriminant functions and the predictors	103
Table 4.4:	Classification results of original and predicted group membership for OHS 1999	105
Table 4.5:	Functions at group centroids	108
Table 4.6:	Final cluster centers for OHS 1999	110
Table 4.7:	Distribution of QOL groups and their respective ranks based on group centroids (OHS 1999)	111
Table 4.8:	Demographics, employment and income of the QOL groups (OHS 1999)	112
Table 4.9:	Type of dwelling and geographical distribution of households by QOL group (OHS 1999**)**	124
Table 4.10:	Fuel used by households for cooking (OHS 1999)	129
Table 4.11:	Sanitation by QOL groups (OHS 1999)	133
Table 4.12:	Access to clean water and distance from water source (OHS 1999)	137
Table 4.13:	Possession of durable items	142
Table 4.14:	Subjective evaluation of quality of life (OHS 1999)	147
Table 5.1:	Summary of canonical discriminant functions (OHS 1998)	152
Table 5.2:	Statistical significance of discriminant functions (OHS 1998)	153
Table 5.3:	Pooled within correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions - structure matrix.	155
Table 5.4:	Classification results of original and predicted group membership for OHS-1998	
Table 5.5:	Functions at group centroids	158
Table 5.6	Final cluster centres for OHS 1998	159

Table 5.7:	Distribution of QOL groups and their respective ranks based on group – centroids	160
Table 5.8:	Demographics, employment and income of the QOL groups (OHS 1998)	161
Table 5.9:	Type of dwelling and geographical distribution of households by QOL group (OHS 1998)	172
Table 5.10:	Fuel used by households for cooking and lighting	176
Table 5.11:	Access to sanitation by households	180
Table 5.12:	Access to clean water and distance from water source	184
Table 5.13:	Possession of durable items (OHS 1998)	189
Table 5.14:	Subjective evaluation of quality of life	194
Table 6.1:	Summary of canonical discriminant functions for OHS 1997	199
Table 6.2:	Wilks' lambda and chi – square results – OHS 1997	200
Table 6.3:	Pooled within correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions – OHS 1997	201
Table 6.4:	Classification results of original and predicted group membership for OHS- 1997	203
Table 6.5:	Unstandardised canonical discriminant functions at group centroids	204
Table 6.6:	Final cluster centres for OHS 1997	205
Table 6.7:	Distribution of QOL groups and their respective ranks based on centroids group	206
Table 6.8:	Demographics, employment and income of the QOL groups (OHS 1997)	207
Table 6.9:	Type of dwelling and geographical distribution of households by QOL group (OHS 1997)	219
Table 6.10:	Fuel used by households for cooking and lighting	223
Table 6.11:	Access to clean water and distance from water source	227
Table 6.12:	Access to sanitation by households	232
Table 6.13:	Possession of durable items	236
Table 6.14:	Subjective evaluation of quality of life	241
Table 7.1:	Summary of canonical discriminant functions for OHS 1996	247
Table7.2	Wilks' lambda and chi – square results (OHS 1996)	248
Table 7.3:	Pooled within correlations between discriminating variables and standardised anonical discriminant functions (OHS 1996)	249
Table 7.4:	Classification results of original and predicted group membership for OHS - 1996	252
Table 7.5:	Unstandardised canonical discriminant functions at group centroids	253
Table 7.6:	Final cluster centres for OHS 1996	254

Table 7.7:	Distribution of QOL groups and their respective ranks based on group centroids	255
Table 7.8:	Demographics, employment and income of the QOL groups (OHS1996)	256
Table7.9:	Type of dwelling and geographical distribution of households by QOL group (OHS 1996)	265
Table 7.10:	Fuel used by households for cooking and lighting	269
Table 7.11:	Access to sanitation by households	272
Table 7.12:	Access to clean water and distance from water source	275
Table 7.13:	Possession of durable items	279
Table 7.14:	Subjective evaluation of quality of life	283
Table 8.1:	Summary distribution of QOL groups (1999-1996)	298
Table 8.2:	Distribution of the top and bottom composite groups (1999-1996)	299
Table 8.3:	Percentage distribution of African/Black population in the top two and bottom two QOL groups (1999-1996)	300
Table 8.4:	Percentage distribution of female household headship in the extreme QOL groups (1999-1996)	302
Table 8.5:	A comparison of subjective assessment of QOL groups for OHS 1999 (percentage)	307
Table 8.6:	A comparison of subjective assessment of QOL groups for OHS 1998 to OHS 1996 (percentage)	308

LIST OF FIGURES PAGE

Figure 3.1: Poverty, its antecedents and consequences 69

Figure 3.2: The conceptual model of the interactions between quality of life and the –variables (indicators) impacting on quality if life (QOL) 72

Figure 3.3. Classification of multivariate methods. 80

LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune -Deficiency Syndrome
AMPS	All Media Products Survey
DF	Discriminant Function
DFID	Department for Finance and International Development
EC	Eastern Cape
HIV	Human Immune Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICP	International Comparison Programme
IFAD	International Fund for African/Agricultural Development
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LDF	Lineardiscriminant function
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSM	Living Standards Measure
OHS	October Household Survey
PhD	Doctorate of philosophy
QOL	Quality Of Life
QOL	Quality Of Life
SAARF	South African Advertising Research Foundation
SARPN	Southern African Regional Poverty Network
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
SWB	Subjective Well-Being
U.S.A	United States of America
U.S	United States of America
VIP	Ventilated Improved Pit latrine