

The Greater Victoria Well-Being Survey

# “The Happiness Index”

## A SUMMARY REPORT

April 2009



## Why Measure Happiness and Wellbeing?

The need to develop and implement systematic measures of wellbeing has become an international priority, largely because of the increasing focus on sustainable development. For example, in June 2007, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Commission, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference issued a joint proclamation that focused on the fundamental importance of developing new and expanded measurements of progress. The proclamation affirmed the organization's...“commitment to measuring and fostering progress of societies in all their dimensions and to supporting initiatives at the country level. We urge statistical offices, public and private organizations, and academic experts to work alongside representatives of their communities to produce high-quality facts-based information that can be used by all of society to form a shared view of societal well-being and its evolution over time. We invite both public and private organizations to contribute to this ambitious effort to foster the world’s progress and we welcome initiatives at the local, regional, national and international level.”

The notion of well-being is also central to our conceptions of health and healthy communities. For example, the definition of health that is used by the World Health Organization gives primacy to wellbeing - “Health is a state of complete **physical, mental and social well-being**, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Most definitions of well-being have emphasized the notion of living a happy and satisfying life. In recent years, this notion has become the primary theme in the measurement of the concept - *self-reported happiness and life-satisfaction*. These are also the concepts that are used in the Greater Victoria Well-being Survey.

## **The Greater Victoria Well-being Survey**

The survey was done by a partnership of eight organizations in Greater Victoria: the Capital Regional District, the City of Victoria, the Community Council, the BC Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, United Way, University of Victoria, Vancouver Island Health Authority and the Victoria Foundation.

The contributors to happiness and well-being that are employed in the survey are based on a framework that was developed by a group of international scholars from eastern and western countries, who came together to help the nation of Bhutan develop a measurement framework for their developmental philosophy of Gross National Happiness. This effort was been supported by the United Nations Development Program. Annual conferences were held for the past four years in Bhutan, Thailand and Canada to review the research literature for the purpose of identifying the primary contributors to happiness and well-being in different cultures and countries. The next meeting will take place in the fall of 2009 in Brazil.

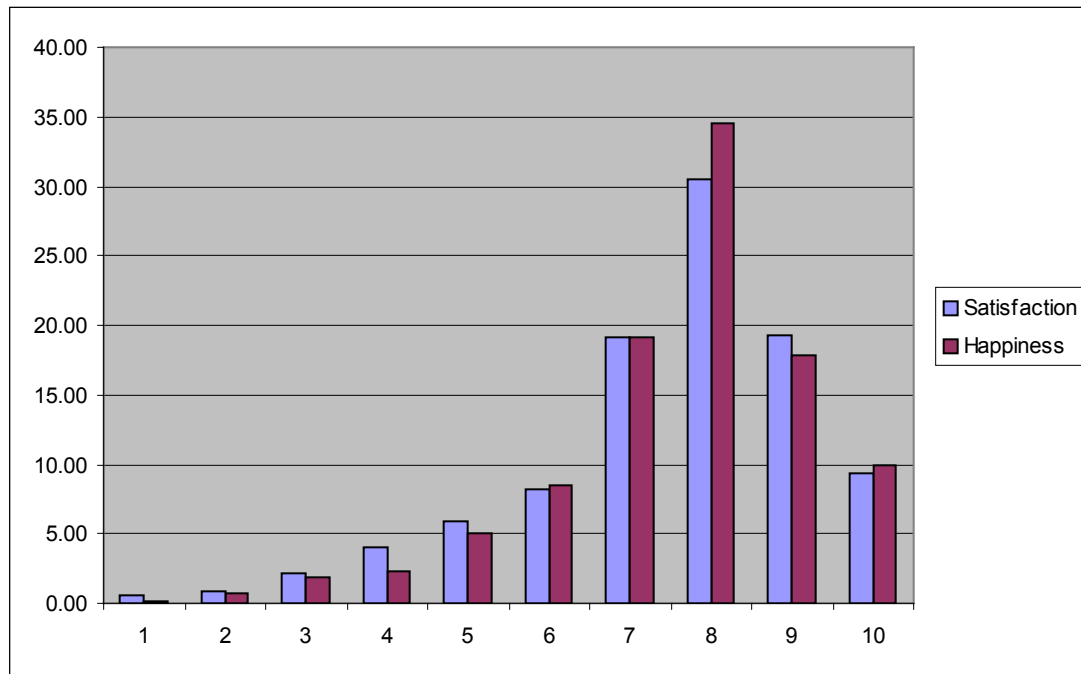
The primary factors that are known to contribute to well-being are:

- Physical and Mental Health
- Time Balance
- Social and Community Vitality
- Cultural Vitality
- Material Standards
- Quality of Governance
- Environmental Vitality

The survey instrument used in the Greater Victoria survey was developed through an international collaboration that involves participants from Canada, Bhutan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Thailand, Brazil and New Zealand. The survey was mailed out to a random sample of Greater Victoria residents in October and November 2009. A total of 2400 completed surveys were returned by early January.

## Well-being in Greater Victoria

Wellbeing was measured through the use of ten-point rating scales of satisfaction-with-life and happiness. Overall, there was a relatively high rate of life-satisfaction and happiness among the respondents. The average score on both scales was 7.6 and this figure is very close to the most recent average for Canada (7.7) as a whole. The country with the highest average score is Denmark (8.2) and Switzerland (8.0). Canada usually ranks among the top five of nations. As a group, then, we are among the happiest in the world.



I would be more satisfied with my life if...

I had less stress in my life	66%
I had more financial security	66%
I could spend more time with family and friends	61%
I had more money	55%
I could contribute more to the community	34%
I had more possessions	6%

The largest percentage of respondents (66%) reported that they would be more satisfied with their lives if they had less stress and more financial security.

Overall, life-satisfaction and happiness was highest among-

- The young and the old
- Higher income earners
- Married and widowed persons
- Retired persons and homemakers
- People living with a spouse, with or without kids

## **The Determinants of Wellbeing**

The survey also measured the principal factors that are known to contribute to life-satisfaction and happiness

- Physical and Mental Health
- Time Balance
- Social and Community Vitality
- Cultural Vitality
- Material Standards
- Quality of Governance
- Environmental Vitality

The scores on happiness and the various contributors were calculated as a percentage of the maximum score that was possible on each dimension. Each score, therefore, is out of 100.

Dimension	Definition	Score (out of 100)
<b>Happiness</b>	Self-reported happiness and life-satisfaction	76
<b>Social and Community Vitality</b>		77
Social Support	The availability of support in times of crisis	83
Family and Friends	Satisfaction with relationship with family and friends	79
Interpersonal Trust	Trust of colleagues, neighbours, businesses, strangers and feelings of safety	69
<b>Material Wellbeing</b>		73
Freedom from Deprivation	Material deprivations related to food, housing, clothing and medicines	92
Financial Satisfaction	Satisfaction with financial circumstances and security	53
<b>Cultural Vitality</b>		71
Inclusion	Freedom from discrimination and feelings of exclusion due to ethnicity, race, religion or values	76
Access and Participation	Satisfaction with ability to participate in cultural, arts and recreational events	65
<b>Health Status</b>	Self-reported physical, mental and cognitive health status	70
<b>Governance</b>	Satisfaction with electoral process, government, courts, access to information, rights and freedoms	67
<b>Quality of Environment</b>	Satisfaction with access to the natural environment and quality of environment.	63
<b>Time Balance</b>	Self-reported stress, time pressures and enjoyment of typical activities	46

The relatively high rates for happiness and life-satisfaction in Greater Victoria were due to strong performances on four of the contributors - social and community vitality, material wellbeing, cultural vitality and health status. The contributor with the lowest score was time balance, reflecting high levels of stress, time demands, and concerns about maintaining a balanced lifestyle among many respondents.

There were also some interesting results among the sub-components on some of the contributors-

- In the Material Wellbeing dimension, very high scores for “Freedom from Deprivation” (92) were offset by lower scores on people’s sense of satisfaction with their financial situation (53).

- Within the Cultural Vitality dimension, relatively high levels of satisfaction were reported by respondents with the extent to which they felt connected to the community, despite differences in ethnicity, race, religion or values (76). They were somewhat less likely to report that they were satisfied with their ability to participate in arts, cultural and recreational events in the community (65).

- Within the Social and Community Vitality dimension, very strong scores were registered on social support (83%) and satisfaction with family and friends (79), while somewhat lower scores were reported for interpersonal trust (69).

### **The Geography of Wellbeing**

The percentage of persons who scored high (8 to 10) on the life-satisfaction scale varied among the communities that comprise Greater Victoria. The rate of satisfaction was highest on the Peninsula (70%)- an area which includes Central Saanich, North Saanich and the Gulf Islands. It was lowest in the Western Communities at 54% (Colwood, Highlands, Langford, Metchosin, Sooke and the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area). The Core area reported a rate of 60%.

### **The Challenge of Time-Balance**

These results suggested that stress and problems of time-balance were the most important factors in limiting wellbeing across the regional population. Only 26% of the people who responded reported that they spent “most” or “all of their time” in a typical week doing things that they enjoyed. Almost an equal number (23%) reported that “not much” of their time was spent on enjoyable activities.

Only 31% described their lives as “not very” or “not at all” stressful and stressed people were significantly less likely to report high levels of life-satisfaction and happiness. They were also less likely to report that they spent most of their time in enjoyable activities.

The leading source of stress were the pressures of time- feeling that the days are too short to do all the things they want (61%) and feeling under stress because don't have enough time (56%).

Stress levels were highest among females, middle-aged persons, separated persons and single-parents. Along the income spectrum, the highest rates of stress were recorded by the highest and lowest income groups with middle-income groups reporting somewhat lower levels. Among employed persons, "too many demands" was the most frequent source of job stress.

## **Summary**

Most residents of Greater Victoria experience relatively high level of wellbeing. These high levels of wellbeing are buoyed by strong social relations, feelings of connectedness to community, and relatively low levels of material deprivation for most members of the community. The primary factors that limit a greater sense of wellbeing across the population are time stresses and the challenges of living a more balanced life.

There are, however, significant populations who experience lower levels of wellbeing- particularly low-income earners and single - parents. These groups also face substantial time stresses but are less likely to enjoy the material and social supports that help to buttress the effects of the stress on their sense of wellbeing.

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