Canada’s General Social Survey

Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division
Primary Objectives of GSS

• to monitor changes in the living conditions and wellbeing of Canadians over time by gathering data on social trends

• to provide information on current or emerging issues in Canadian society.
The GSS program

• Started in 1985
• Telephone surveys in 10 provinces
• Repeated cycles by topic (usually every 5 years)
• Some topics moved to subject areas (health, education, technology)
• New topics introduced
Methodology

• Data collected over a 12-month period from the population living in private households in the 10 provinces

• Population aged 15 and older, except:
  – Cycles 16 and 21 only sampled persons aged 45 and older
Methodology continued

- Response rates for the GSS are typically around 70 to 80%.
- Prior to 1999, the sample size was 10,000.
- 1999 to present, sample increased to approximately 25,000.
- With a sample of 25,000, basic estimates are available at the national, provincial and CMA levels.
Producing estimates

- We can produce estimates for some small population groups such as persons with disabilities, people in visible minorities and seniors (some cycles oversample)

- The sample size is not large enough to produce estimates for Aboriginal peoples except all groups combined, for Canada
## Monitoring changes: Repeated cycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle year (Cycle number)</th>
<th>1(^{st})</th>
<th>2(^{nd})</th>
<th>3(^{rd})</th>
<th>4(^{th})</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1985(1)</td>
<td>1991(6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Victimization</td>
<td>1988(3)</td>
<td>1993(8)</td>
<td>1999(13)</td>
<td>2004(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1990(5)</td>
<td>1995(10)</td>
<td>2001(15)</td>
<td>2006(20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Support and Aging</td>
<td>1985(1)</td>
<td>1990(5)</td>
<td>1996(11)</td>
<td>2002(16)</td>
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<td>2007 (21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to and use of ICT</td>
<td>2000(14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Engagement</td>
<td>2003(17)</td>
<td>2008(22)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content common to GSS cycles

- Demographic characteristics of respondent
- General health
- Main activity of respondent and respondent’s spouse or partner
- Education of respondent, spouse or partner and parents
- Housing characteristics
- Other characteristics (immigration status, aboriginal, visible minority status (sometimes), language)
Victimization
(Fifth planned for 2009)

Population survey
• provides an important complement to officially recorded crime rates  
• measures both crime incidents that come to the attention of the police and those that are unreported

Collects comprehensive information on Canadians’
• experiences of victimization  
• perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system  
• characteristics of the victim, the incident and the perpetrator
Criminal Victimization Screening

Measures 8 types of crimes

Personal Victimizations:

Violent Victimizations
- Sexual assault
- Robbery
- Physical assault

Theft of personal property

Household victimizations:

- Break and enter
- Motor vehicle/parts theft
- Theft or Attempted theft of household property
- Vandalism
Cycle 18:
- Oversampled Winnipeg (500 cases)
- Neighbourhood data from Census on the main file

• Cycles 13 & 18 - Same file structure:
  – **Main file**: contains questionnaire responses and associate information (1 line = 1 resp.)
  – **Incident file**: contains information about any individual victimization incidents which the respondent may have experienced (1 line = 1 incident)
Time use

Major subjects surveyed in 2005:
- Time Use Diary
- Child Care Diary
- Social Capital
- Transportation
- Culture Activities
- Sports Participation Activities
Summary of new features for 2005 GSS

- Increased sample size
- New modules:
  - Transportation
  - Close social network ties
- Expansion of activity codes
  - Impact of Internet use
  - Email/chat communication
- Canada/US comparisons
Notes on using time use cycles

• All cycles:
  – Main file: Contains information from respondents who answered questions on unpaid help, cultural activities and organized sport (1 line = 1 respondent)
  – Episode file: provides the detailed information on each activity episode reported by respondents (1 line = 1 episode)

• Cycles 2 & 7:
  – Summary file: contains information from respondents who answered the time use diary
Family

Major subjects surveyed in 2006:
- Family history and structure
- Birth/Adoption of child in past 5 years
- Child custody
- Financial support agreements and arrangements for child and ex-Spouse/ex-Partner
- Social networks
- Work-family balance and family functioning
- Well-being
Notes on family cycles

- Cycle 5 – oversampled the elderly
- Cycle 10 – additional 1,250 in sample from Quebec
- Cycle 15 – focused on family history and family structure
- Cycle 20 – Beginning to have a life course perspective
Notes on family cycles

• Cycles 10 and 15:
  – Main File: includes one record per respondent and provides the data for most sections of the questionnaire
  – Child File: consists of all children ever raised by the respondent
  – Union File: consists of all unions reported by the respondent

• Cycles 5 and 20:
  – Main File: includes of one record per respondent and provides the data for most sections of the questionnaire
Social Support
Two cycles of data –
1996 and 2002 (aged 45+)
(Third cycle to be released September 2008)

Major subjects surveyed in 2007:
- Health status and well-being
- Care given
- Care received
- Housing
- Social contact
GSS Themes → Retirement

Two cycles of data –
1996 and 2002 (aged 45+)
(Third cycle to be released September 2008)

Major subjects surveyed in 2007:
– Retirement planning
– Retirement experiences
– Motivation and obstacles to returning to work
– Education
– Main activity
Notes on social support cycles

• Cycle 11 – oversampled 65+, with more from Quebec

• Cycle 16 – only respondents aged 45+
  – Care receiving (by respondents 65+)
  – Care giving (by respondents 65+, to all ages)
  – Care giving (by respondents 45-64, to people 65+)

• Cycle 21 – only respondents aged 45+
  Life Course Perspective
Social Networks
Two cycles of data –
2003, 2008 (currently in collection!)

Major subjects surveyed in 2008:
– Mobilization of social networks during life changes
– Civic participation
– Sense of community belonging
– Wellbeing, happiness and life satisfaction
Notes on social networks cycles

- Census community variables available
- New urban/rural derived variable added called LUC_RST (based on commuting distance)
Access to and Use of Information Communication Technology
Two cycles of data –
1994 and 2000

Major subjects surveyed in 2000:
- Access to ICTs in the home, at work, at school, at public location
- Uses of Internet
- Pornography and hate on the Internet
- Computers at work
- Learning to use computers
Notes on ICT cycle

• Since 2003 – annual questions on Internet use in the past 12 months

• In the 2005 Time Use Survey - new codes for:
  • email use, surfing the Internet, chatting online, playing computer or video games, general computer use and other Internet communication
  – These are all relevant only to non-work time spent

• In the 2009 Victimization survey - a section on Internet Victimization, including cyber-bullying
Data Files

- Analytic files available in the RDCs
- PUMFs available for all released cycles
Contact information

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