



Ubomu obunesidima ngoku!

DSL

#decentstandardofliving

A 2021 VALIDATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIALLY PERCEIVED NECESSITIES FOR A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII) is an independent feminist research think tank that focuses on generating new knowledge, information, and analysis in the field of poverty and inequality studies.

This Decent Standard of Living (DSL) research report is an output from a recent study undertaken by SPII in collaboration with Labour Research Service (LRS) and Southern African Social Policy Research Insights (SASPRI).

The objective of this project was to reflect on and review 'Socially Perceived Necessities' (SPNs) which underpin the DSL measure, an alternative formulation for a metric of a decent standard of living for all South African citizens. This is in line with the South Africa Constitution that seeks to provide citizens with the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights whilst meeting with the provisions of Sustainable Development Goals specifically, 1, 2, 5 and 10 and the other goals generally.

This report seeks to consolidate existing knowledge of SPNs and the policy formation dynamics in South Africa in order to argue for government programmes that take into account the needs of its citizens including dignified livelihoods.

This work is funded by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) South Africa whose financial contribution to this research survey is gratefully acknowledged. The research team would also like to acknowledge Ms Linda Findlay and the BDRC Africa team for conducting the telephonic survey that forms the basis of this report.

ABBREVIATIONS

CPI	Consumer Price Index
DSL	Decent Standard of Living
DSLI	Decent Standard of Living Index
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
LCS	Living Conditions Survey
LRS	Labour Research Service
MYPE	Mid-Year Population Estimates
SASAS	South African Social Attitudes Survey
SASPRI	Southern African Social Policy Research Insights
SPII	Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute
SPN	Socially Perceived Necessity
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Decent Standard of Living (DSL) project is a groundbreaking study in South Africa that uses survey data to identify what constitutes a decent standard of living, and then quantifies the amount of monthly income that is associated with having the socially-determined decent standard of living which enables full participation in society (Frye et al., 2018). While other complementary poverty indicators exist, such as the upper and lower bound poverty lines, in addition to the food poverty line, the DSL is an attempt to go beyond that, using social consensus to measure what is required to not just merely survive, but to live a life without struggle. This is essential to the realisation of the fundamental right to dignity guaranteed to all in Section 9 of the Constitution.

Indeed, despite a long running debate on poverty and inequality in South Africa, we have not had a robust measure of what it is to live decently. Simply put, we do not know what a decent life looks like - nor what the associated income level would be. Thus, developing a standard is essential to enable policy makers to design policies that are aligned to meet that standard. This is foundational to the National Development Plan 2030 adopted by government in 2012 that commits to a multifaceted Decent Standard of Life.

In addition, the South African government is a signatory to the United Nations (UN) International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) that guarantees the right to an adequate standard of living for all in Article 11 of the Covenant. The UN CESCR Committee published its recommendations in November 2018 on South Africa's initial report on its implementation of provisions outlined in the ICESCR. One of the recommendations was that the South African government needs to create a composite index on the cost of living that provides the government with a benchmark to adequately set the levels of social benefits consistent with the requirement to ensure an adequate standard of living for all. The right to an adequate standard of living – which includes food, clothing and housing, and “continuous improvement of living conditions” is enshrined in ICESCR in Article 11.

The project is a collaboration between Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII), the Labour Research Service (LRS) and Southern African Social Policy Research Insights (SASPRI). The recent research survey described in this report was funded by UNICEF whose work in the multi-dimensional poverty space fits in with the SPII objective of generating research that informs the fight against poverty and inequality.

The DSL measure was launched in 2018 and drew on earlier studies involving both qualitative and quantitative methods, including:

- Approximately 50 focus groups undertaken in 2004 across the country about what comprises an acceptable standard of living;
- A module in the 2006 South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) to determine which of a set of 50 items are essential for an acceptable standard of living (informed by the focus groups and piloted in 2005); and
- Modules in the 2008/09 and 2014/15 Living Conditions Surveys (LCS) to measure possession or lack of the items.

The first step in constructing the DSL measure was to devise a set of indicators that would measure a decent standard of living. This was done by utilising the results from the SASAS 2006 module.

Out of a list of 50 possible items, a set of 21 'Socially Perceived Necessities' (SPNs) were defined as essential to a decent life by a two thirds majority of South Africans surveyed.

The SPNs included material possessions, social networks and features of the local neighbourhood. As this list is a set of indicators, rather than an exhaustive list of necessities, it allows us methodologically to sidestep the immense difficulty of determining the quality and quantity of an essential basket of goods that is both representative of the population and also finite.

The next step was to measure possession of the SPNs and then explore the relationship between possession of the SPNs and income. This was undertaken with data from the LCS 2014/15.

The final DSL measure is a per capita monthly median income amount which reflects the income level associated with households who possess the SPNs – or a decent standard of living.

The importance of multidimensional measures of poverty has been globally acknowledged. One firm advocate is UNICEF, according to UNICEF South Africa’s country representative, Ms Christine Muhigana,

“multidimensional poverty approaches recognise the reality that in addition to income poverty, human beings live in real social settings and develop a refined and immediate understanding of what makes them ‘poor’. Such measures cannot be easily quantified and require careful thinking to uncover the depths and severity of lived subjective experiences.”

The SPNs, as categorised in the DSL, do seek to provide a reasonable measure, reflecting the majority view of a decent standard of living. Ms Muhigana continues further to say,

“the challenge is always to improve the quality of our measurements so that our tools are commensurate with the lived experiences of real human beings. It is of little use to produce data and research that do not speak to what people experience and live through daily.”

In order to remain relevant, the SPNs need to be reviewed from time-to-time. By 2021 it was deemed important to return to the field and refresh the 2006 survey in order to find out whether these indicators are still a good measure of a decent life currently, especially in a world so affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic.

BDRC Africa was commissioned to conduct a primary research study to obtain attitudinal information about the things that people need for an acceptable standard of living in present-day South Africa. The survey was based on the established measurement model comprising 50 key attributes relating to personal belongings, access to community-based services or facilities, activities, and relationships with family and friends. In June 2021, BDRC Africa commenced the survey, which, due to Covid-19 restrictions, could only be conducted via individual telephonic interviews.

This report presents analysis of the data obtained from the telephonic survey, revealing how the definition of a decent standard of living has changed since 2006 and providing a refreshed set of indicators – or SPNs – to underpin a new DSL measure in due course.

2. METHODOLOGY

A total of n=921 quantitative interviews were conducted via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) between 4 June 2021 and 1 July 2021. Respondents were randomly selected from a consumer database list provided by List SA. Respondents were subsequently screened to ensure their eligibility to participate in the study based on a quota-controlled sample designed to be representative of the South African population in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, income and urban/rural dwelling (see **Table 1**). Interviews were carried out in five languages – namely English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Sesotho – according to respondents’ stated preference at the beginning of the interview.

Table 1:
SAMPLE DESIGN

		N=921	%
Race	Black	598	64.9%
	White	178	19.3%
	Coloured	95	10.3%
	Indian	50	5.4%
Gender	Male	470	51.0%
	Female	451	49.0%
Age	18-24	166	18.0%
	25-59	635	69.0%
	60+	120	13.0%
Province	Gauteng	323	35.1%
	KwaZulu Natal	248	26.9%
	Western Cape	148	16.1%
	Eastern Cape	138	15.0%
	Free State	64	7.0%
Urban/Rural	Urban/peri-urban	617	67.0%
	Rural	304	33.0%
Income	R0-R4,999	359	39.0%
	R5,000-R9,999	269	29.2%
	R10,000-R19,999	156	16.9%
	R20,000-R39,999	74	8.0%
	R40,000+	45	4.9%
	Refused	18	2.0%

The survey objective was communicated to potential respondents from the outset. Their informed consent was obtained before screening for eligibility and proceeding with the interview. The questionnaire comprised a screener section and a main survey section.

The screener questions were used to capture demographic information about the respondent, namely gender, age, ethnicity, income, province, urban/peri-urban/rural dweller, children under 18 living in the household. This included a self-defined wealth/poverty status question.

The main survey section comprised a battery of 50 attributes, each of which respondents had to categorise as being 'essential' for everyone to have, or 'desirable' to have, or 'neither' in order to enjoy an acceptable standard of living in South Africa. Respondents had to choose one answer from the given list of three possible answers. The attributes were split into four questions according to whether they were items, activities, features of their neighbourhood or related to relationships with their friends and family. Statements within each of the four questions were randomised to prevent any bias in results due to respondent fatigue.

A comparison of the survey sample with Statistics South Africa's Mid-Year Population Estimates (MYPE) for 2021 for three key demographic characteristics is shown in **Table 2**. Although the distributions are similar in the survey sample and MYPEs, there are some notable discrepancies. It was decided therefore to reweight the survey data, controlling to demographic data for mid-2021. The reweighting process was undertaken using the technique of iterative proportional fitting (IPF) also referred to as 'raking'. The Stata .ado file ipfraking was used and the reweighting controlled to the three demographic characteristics and categories shown in **Table 1**.

Table 2:

POPULATION SHARES FOR THREE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, SURVEY AND MID-YEAR POPULATION ESTIMATES

Demographic characteristics		Percentage survey	Percentage MYPE 2021
Race	Black	64.9	78.5
	Coloured	10.3	9.1
	Indian	5.4	2.3
	White	19.3	9.4
Gender	Male	51.0	48.0
	Female	49.0	52.0
Age	18-29	29.8	30.0
	30-49	45.7	44.2
	50+	24.5	25.8

Note: MYPE for 18-29 year olds calculated as 40% of the 15-19 age group + 20-24 year olds + 25-29 year olds.

3. FINDINGS

As indicated, respondents were asked whether each of the 50 items is essential for everyone to have in order to enjoy an acceptable standard of living in South Africa today. These items covered material possessions, activities, neighbourhood facilities and relationships with friends and family. The three possible answers were ‘essential’, ‘desirable’ or ‘neither’.

Table 3 shows the percentage responding that an item is essential, first without using weights (every observation has a weight of 1) and then with the new weights generated as described above. Alongside this is the percentage responding essential when these questions were last asked in SASAS 2006. The table is sorted by the weighted percentage responding essential in 2021.

The usual way of determining whether an item should be regarded as a socially perceived necessity (SPN) is to look at the majority view, that is any item defined as essential by 50% or more of the study population.

On this basis, 34 items are SPNs in 2021, compared to 36 items in 2006. A garden (49%), some new clothes (46%), and a special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival (34%) dropped out of the list of SPNs in 2021, while a lock-up garage for vehicles moved in, but only just at 51%. Certain items saw a big change in the percentage of people responding essential between 2006 and 2021, including somewhere for children to play safely outside the house, a cell phone, and burglar bars in the house, which were regarded as essential by an additional 10% or more. There were also items which fewer people regarded as essential in 2021, including a place of worship in the local area, someone to lend you money in an emergency and a radio, which all had a difference of at least 10% points between 2006 and 2021.

The reweighting does not make too much difference overall or to the list of 34 SPNs. A radio and a lock-up garage for vehicles, both just under 50%, would not have been in the list of SPNs had the data not been reweighted, and a car, at 51%, would have been in the list.

Table 3:

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS DEFINING AN ITEM AS ESSENTIAL, 2021 AND 2006

KEY	Two thirds threshold (27 SPNs)	50% threshold (34 SPNs)		
Item	% responding essential in 2021 (unweighted)	% responding essential in 2021 (weighted)	% responding essential in 2006	
Mains electricity in the house	93.05	92.42	92	
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	90.66	91.54	91	
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather, e.g. rain, winds, etc.	92.07	90.95	90	
Street lighting	90.99	90.55	85	
A fridge	90.01	90.05	86	
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	90.01	89.05	89	

Item	% responding essential in 2021 (unweighted)	% responding essential in 2021 (weighted)	% responding essential in 2006
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	83.39	84.06	79
A flush toilet in the house	85.34	83.62	78
Paid employment for people of working age	84.15	83.52	79
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	82.30	83.06	72
A cell phone	79.80	82.96	63
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	83.50	82.96	77
Having police on the streets in the local area	82.30	81.69	80
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	80.89	81.55	82
A neighbourhood without rubbish/ refuse/ garbage in the streets	81.54	80.35	75
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	78.94	79.91	81
A fence or wall around the property	80.02	79.78	74
Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	80.24	79.38	74
Burglar bars in the house	79.15	79.21	62
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/ funeral insurance/ burial society	74.70	77.86	82
Being able to visit friends and family in hospital and other institutions	74.16	75.52	73
Tarred roads close to the house	75.35	74.78	80
Regular savings for emergencies	72.64	73.98	71
A place of worship (church/ mosque / synagogue) in the local area	72.42	71.48	87
A large supermarket in the local area	69.92	71.34	75
A bath or shower in the house	73.94	70.45	62
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	67.75	69.24	76
A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	63.95	63.68	69
Television / TV	59.50	63.58	69
Someone to lend you money in an emergency	51.36	55.29	66
A sofa / lounge suite	51.57	54.63	54

Item	% responding essential in 2021 (unweighted)	% responding essential in 2021 (weighted)	% responding essential in 2006
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	53.31	54.49	62
A radio	49.51	52.71	74
A lock-up garage for vehicles	49.84	51.07	43
A car	50.81	48.75	49
A garden	44.30	48.65	51
Washing machine	47.88	45.83	44
Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	44.52	45.61	55
A burglar alarm system for the house	43.54	44.10	38
A smart phone	38.87	41.81	/
An armed response service for the house	36.48	37.65	28
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	32.90	34.28	56
A computer in the home	32.79	33.69	26
A small amount of money to spend on yourself, not on your family, each week	28.66	30.84	42
For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with	28.88	30.80	39
Having enough money to give presents on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, funerals	27.14	29.70	41
A family take-away or bring-home meal once a month	27.47	29.14	34
Satellite television/DSTV	23.56	26.06	19
A holiday away from home for one week a year, not visiting relatives	22.69	24.52	37
A DVD player	12.70	13.91	27

Note: For the 2021 survey, landline was dropped and smart phone was added.

For the DSL analysis, based on the responses to the 2006 survey, a more stringent threshold was used to determine the SPNs; that is any item regarded as essential by two thirds or more of respondents.

This resulted in 27 SPNs¹, which is the same number as in 2021. However, the list of SPNs is not quite the same, with a cell phone, burglar bars and a bath or shower in the house joining the list of SPNs in 2021, while a neighbourhood without smoke or smog, television and radio dropped out.

Overall, the list of SPNs, whether using a 50% or two thirds threshold, has remained quite stable over time.

¹ This was reduced to 21 items for the DSL analysis because certain items were excluded as possession of the item could not be measured for all households.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha is a technique that can be used to test the reliability of the set of items identified as essential (Cronbach, 1951). In other words, it looks at how well the indicators capture the underlying concept of a decent standard of living. It was used in the analysis of SASAS 2006 (Wright, 2008) and also in similar studies internationally. The scale reliability coefficient (alpha) measures the set of items defined as essential with all other hypothetical sets of items. The square root of the coefficient (alpha) is the estimated correlation of the set of items with a set of errorless true scores (Cronbach, 1951). For the set of 34 items defined as essential (based on a 50% threshold), the scale reliability coefficient (alpha) is 0.8572 and the square root of the coefficient (alpha) is 0.9259. In SASAS 2006, the scores were 0.9201 and 0.9592 respectively (Wright, 2008). Although not comprehensive, the 34 items can be considered a reliable measure of an acceptable standard of living as according to Nunnally (1981), reliability coefficients of 0.7 or higher are sufficient. If the higher two thirds threshold is used, the coefficient alpha is still above 0.7 at 0.8432 (square root 0.9183).

Analysis by sub-group

It is important to explore the extent to which different groups in the population have different views on which items are essential. If particular sub-groups respond in very different ways and an item is only defined as essential by certain groups in the population, then it could cast doubt on the set of SPNs.

High level of correlation across diversity of groupings

First, correlations between the responses of different sub-groups for all 50 items are presented in the following tables.² The majority of correlations between sub-groups are higher than 0.9, for example the responses of males and females have a correlation of 0.9742 and the responses of those with children in the household and those without have a correlation of 0.9581 (no tables). With the exception of those defining themselves as wealthy compared to all other self-definitions of wealth status (Table 7), the correlations are all above 0.85.

Table 4:

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL ITEMS, LOCATION

	Urban	Peri-urban	Rural
Urban	1.0000		
Peri-urban	0.9365	1.0000	
Rural	0.9245	0.9322	1.0000

Table 5:

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL ITEMS, AGE GROUP

	18-29	30-49	50+
18-29	1.0000		
30-49	0.9671	1.0000	
50+	0.9355	0.9580	1.0000

Table 6:

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL ITEMS, POPULATION GROUP

	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White
Black African	1.0000			
Coloured	0.8901	1.0000		
Indian/Asian	0.8509	0.9316	1.0000	
White	0.8817	0.9409	0.9300	1.0000

Table 7:

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL ITEMS, SELF-DEFINED WEALTH STATUS

	Wealthy	Comfortable	Just getting along	Poor
Wealthy	1.0000			
Comfortable	0.7509	1.0000		
Just getting along	0.7330	0.9448	1.0000	
Poor	0.6053	0.8824	0.9095	1.0000

Table 8:

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL ITEMS, HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	0_4999	5000_9999	10000_19999	20000_39999	40000_plus
0_4999	1.0000				
5000_9999	0.9555	1.0000			
10000_19999	0.9106	0.9449	1.0000		
20000_39999	0.8735	0.9157	0.9297	1.0000	
40000_plus	0.8893	0.9517	0.9311	0.9156	1.0000

² All correlations reported in this section are Spearman's rank and are significant at the 0.001 level.

The SPNs

Table 9 summarises the responses of different sub-groups, detailing the number of items defined as essential (based on the 50% threshold) by a particular sub-group, how many of these items are SPNs (as defined by the whole population using the 50% threshold), and which of the SPNs are not defined as essential by the sub-group in question. Some sub-groups additionally defined other items as essential and these are also detailed in the table.

In general, the different sub-groups defined a very similar number of items (between 33 and 35) as essential and these are mostly the SPNs. The SPNs most often not defined as essential are someone to lend you money in an emergency, a lock-up garage for vehicles and a radio. A few items are additionally defined as essential, most commonly a car, a garden and a washing machine.

The peri-urban group defined 38 items as essential: the 34 SPNs and also a car, a garden, a burglar alarm and a smart phone. At the other end of the spectrum, the group which defined themselves as wealthy regarded only 22 items as essential. The Indian/Asian population group also defined a smaller number of items as essential: 29 in total, all of which are SPNs. The white population group also regarded only 29 of the SPNs as essential, but additionally defined a car and a washing machine as essential.

Table 9:

SUMMARY OF SUB-GROUP RESPONSES (50% THRESHOLD)

Sub-group	Number of items considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of SPNs as defined by total population (out of total of 34)	SPNs not considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of items in addition to SPNs defined by total population	Additional items considered essential by majority of sub-group
Urban	34	32	someone to lend you money in an emergency; radio	2	car; garden
Peri-urban	38	34	/	4	car; garden, burglar alarm; smart phone
Rural	34	33	lock-up garage for vehicles	1	garden
Male	33	32	meat or fish every day; lock-up garage for vehicles	1	car
Female	34	34	/	0	/
18-29 year olds	33	33	radio	0	/
30-49 year olds	35	34	/	1	garden
50+ year olds	35	32	someone to lend you money in an emergency; lock-up garage for vehicles	3	car; garden; washing machine
Black African	35	34	/	1	garden
Coloured	34	33	radio	1	washing machine
Indian/Asian	29	29	television; someone to lend you money in an emergency; meat or fish every day; radio; lock-up garage for vehicles	0	/
White	31	29	television; someone to lend you money in an emergency; sofa/ lounge suite; radio; lock-up garage for vehicles	2	car; washing machine
Children in the hh	35	34	/	1	garden

Sub-group	Number of items considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of SPNs as defined by total population (out of total of 34)	SPNs not considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of items in addition to SPNs defined by total population	Additional items considered essential by majority of sub-group
No children in the hh	33	32	someone to lend you money in an emergency; lock-up garage for vehicles	1	car
Wealthy	22	22	street lighting; fridge; cell phone; ability to pay or contribute to funerals; tarred roads close to the house; place of worship in the local area; large supermarket in the local area; television; sofa/lounge suite; meat or fish every day; radio; lock-up garage for vehicles	0	/
Comfortable	36	33	radio	3	car; washing machine, burglar alarm
Just getting along	35	34	/	1	garden
Poor	32	31	sofa/lounge suite; meat or fish every day; lock-up garage for vehicles	1	garden
Hh income 0_4999	34	33	lock-up garage for vehicles	1	garden
Hh income 5000_9999	35	34	/	1	some new clothes
Hh income 10000_19999	35	33	radio	2	car; washing machine
Hh income 20000_39999	33	31	someone to lend you money in an emergency; sofa/lounge suite; radio	2	car; washing machine
Hh income 40000_plus	33	30	place of worship in the local area; someone to lend you money in an emergency; meat or fish every day; radio	3	car; washing machine; some new clothes

Table 10 presents the same analysis but for items regarded as essential by two thirds of respondents. The pattern is very similar with the self-defined wealthy again defining far fewer items as essential (15 in total, 14 of which are SPNs), and the Indian/Asian group also defining a smaller number of items as essential (21 in total, 20 of which are SPNs). With the two thirds threshold, the self-defined poor regarded 22 items as essential, all of which are SPNs. This is a lower proportion of the 27 SPNs than the proportion of the 34 SPNs regarded as essential by the self-defined poor.

Table 10:

SUMMARY OF SUB-GROUP RESPONSES (TWO THIRDS THRESHOLD)

Sub-group	Number of items considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of SPNs as defined by total population (out of total of 27)	SPNs not considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of items in addition to SPNs defined by total population	Additional items considered essential by majority of sub-group
Urban	26	26	someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	0	/
Peri-urban	28	27	/	1	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air
Rural	26	26	bath or shower in the house	0	/
Male	25	25	someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed; place of worship in the local area	0	/
Female	27	27	/	0	/
18-29 year olds	27	27	/	0	/
30-49 year olds	27	27	/	0	/
50+ year olds	25	24	place of worship in the local area; large supermarket in the local area; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	television
Black African	27	26	bath or shower in the house	1	television
Coloured	27	27	/	0	/
Indian/Asian	21	20	cell phone; separate bedrooms for adults and children; ability to pay or contribute to funerals; being able to visit friends and family in hospital; regular savings for emergencies; large supermarket in the local area; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air

Sub-group	Number of items considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of SPNs as defined by total population (out of total of 27)	SPNs not considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of items in addition to SPNs defined by total population	Additional items considered essential by majority of sub-group
White	24	23	ability to pay or contribute to funerals; regular savings for emergencies; large supermarket in the local area; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	car
Children in the hh	27	27	/	0	/
No children in the hh	25	25	large supermarket in the local area; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	0	/
Wealthy	15	14	street lighting; fridge; ability to buy complete school uniform without hardship; cell phone; separate bedrooms for adults and children; fence or wall around the property; someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency; burglar bars in the house; ability to pay or contribute to funerals; tarred roads close to the house; place of worship in the local area; large supermarket in the local area; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air
Comfortable	28	27	/	1	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air
Just getting along	28	27	/	1	television
Poor	22	22	ability to pay or contribute to funerals; tarred roads close to the house; regular savings for emergencies; bath or shower in the house; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	0	/

Sub-group	Number of items considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of SPNs as defined by total population (out of total of 27)	SPNs not considered essential by majority of sub-group	Number of items in addition to SPNs defined by total population	Additional items considered essential by majority of sub-group
Hh income 0_4999	25	24	regular savings for emergencies; large supermarket in the local area; someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	television
Hh income 5000_9999	29	27	/	2	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air; television
Hh income 10000_19999	28	27	/	1	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air
Hh income 20000_39999	28	26	large supermarket in the local area	2	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air; meat or fish every day
Hh income 40000_plus	29	26	place of worship in the local area	3	neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air; lock-up garage for vehicles; washing machine

Child-focused items

There are five items which relate specifically to children:
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house
Separate bedrooms for adults and children
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under 10 from the household are at home
For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with

Only four of the five items are defined as SPNs (with both the 50% and two thirds thresholds), ability to afford toys for children being the one child-focused item not regarded as essential. A reasonably high percentage of respondents regarded the four items as essential, ranging from 80% for having an adult from the household at home to 84% for being able to buy school uniform without hardship.

When analysing by sub-group, the patterns are similar to those described above. The most obvious differences are within population group and within self-defined wealth status. The highlighted cells in **Tables 11** and **12** show where there is a large difference between the percentage of the sub-group responding essential compared to the total population and the other population groups or self-defined wealth status groups. Note, however, that the large differences are not specific to the child-focused items but can also be seen for other items.

Table 11:

PERCENTAGE OF SUB-GROUP RESPONDING ESSENTIAL FOR CHILD-FOCUSED ITEMS, POPULATION GROUP

Child-focused item	Percentage responding essential			
	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	85.13	83.29	72.03	79.64
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	84.63	79.38	71.99	77.00
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82.43	75.92	61.43	86.01
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	80.22	82.50	78.04	75.50
For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with	33.85	19.52	24.54	18.17

Table 12:

PERCENTAGE OF SUB-GROUP RESPONDING ESSENTIAL FOR CHILD-FOCUSED ITEMS, SELF-DEFINED WEALTH STATUS

Child-focused item	Percentage responding essential			
	Wealthy	Comfortable	Just getting along	Poor
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	51.04	86.47	83.25	82.40
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	86.58	83.18	85.10	74.00
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	51.68	78.06	86.01	71.81
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	82.68	85.56	77.45	76.58
For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with	17.32	29.60	32.17	28.18

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since the current 2021 survey did not ask questions on possession, it is not possible to carry out the detailed analysis undertaken for the DSL in 2018 when possession of the SPNs was measured in the LCS 2014/15 alongside household incomes.

For the earlier study, the per capita median income of those possessing the 21 SPNs was calculated in April 2015 prices and subsequently updated each year using a special subset of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), referred to as the Decent Standard of Living Index (DSLII). Given the high degree of correspondence between the 2006 and 2021 SPNs, for the time-being, the DSL could continue to be updated using the DSLII methodology.

However, it is further recommended that a second survey is carried out asking about possession of the SPNs and including a household income question. This would enable the DSL measure to be re-based to a more recent timepoint, which can then be updated on an annual basis using the CPI.

5. CONCLUSION

For policy makers and implementers, there is much to be learned from this 2021 telephonic survey. The results of the survey offer valuable insights into what possessions, activities and services citizens desire. The SPNs, despite their aspirational nature, reflect the standard of living desired by the majority of the population. Despite relative differences in terms of class, age and ethnic origin, people identify and formulate very similar definitions of a decent standard of living, as conceptualized in this study.

It is important to note that the monetary figure derived from analysis of the SPNs is not the amount required for a decent standard of living, it is the amount *associated* with it. It can be used as a guide when reflecting on national minimum wage discussions, as well as social grant amounts and monthly incomes. In the current context of the Social Relief of Distress R350 (Special Covid) grant and the universal Basic Income Guarantee debate in South Africa, this is a crucial measure for use by policy makers in programme implementation.

The combination of SPNs deemed as essential for a decent life are not only tangible items, but also reflect assets that can be derived from one's social networks - for example, someone to look after you if you are ill. Thus, this could be viewed in line with other studies that have looked at social cohesion and the concept of 'ubuntu' as intangible benefits of community living that impact on quality of life within these communities. Social capital is not necessarily correlated with financial capital, and the list of SPNs shows us that not all aspects of a decent life need to be commodified.

The methodological approach used for the DSL measure sees a shift from a narrow, minimalist economic model of measuring the standard of living to a multi-dimensional, socio-economic rights model that is citizen-centred. It is important to recognise that those from the margins, even though often unseen, are not without agency to contribute to research methodologies and subsequent policy formulations that acknowledge lived realities, expectations, and aspirations. The fact that this approach was first used 15 years ago and many of the same SPNs have been reflected in the findings of the 2021 survey, points to the enduring nature and validity of the research tool.

The DSL measure offers more than a series of thresholds around which we can measure how many are below and how many are above the line. It offers us ideas about how to move households towards a socially-derived vision of a decent standard of living. This DSL measure provides a framework for informing policies regarding both public and private provision and acquisition of necessities. It can guide and facilitate the progressive realisation of the constitutional right to dignity via a decent standard of living.

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