

GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY
FEATURES AND STATUS REPORT

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Created for the Data Liberation Initiative

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1.0 GSS PRODUCTS

A number of products based on the General Social Survey (GSS) are available. Publications can be purchased as indicated below.

Public Use Microdata Files¹ (User documentation included)

Cycle 1	Health and Social Support	\$ 750
Cycle 2	Time Use, Social Mobility and Language	\$ 750
Cycle 3	Personal Risk	\$ 750
Cycle 4	Work and Education	\$ 750
Cycle 5	Family and Friends	\$ 750

1 Foreign clients pay total amount in US funds drawn on a US bank.

Cycle 6	Health	\$ 750
Cycle 7	Time Use of Canadians	\$ 750
Cycle 8	Personal Risk	\$1,500
Cycle 9	Education, Work and Retirement	\$1,500
Cycle 10	The Family	\$1,500

The General Social Survey Program has made all of its files available to the "Data Liberation Initiative" (DLI). The DLI provides Canadian academic institutions with affordable access to Statistics Canada data files and databases for teaching and research.

The DLI is a co-operative effort among the Humanities and Social Science Federation of Canada (HSSFC), the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), the Canadian Association of Public Data Users (CAPDU), the Canadian Association of Small University Libraries (CASUL), Statistics Canada and other government departments. It has been approved as a five-year pilot.

Publications

- Cycle 1 *Health and Social Support, 1985*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 1,
Out of Print
- Cycle 2 *Where does time go?*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 4,
\$40 Canada; US \$48 United States; US \$56 Other Countries
- Cycle 3 *Ups and downs on the ladder of Success:
Social mobility in Canada*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 5,
\$40 Canada; US \$48 United States; US \$56 Other Countries
- Cycle 3 *Patterns of Criminal Victimization in Canada*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 2,
\$38 Canada; \$46 Other Countries
- Cycle 3 *Accidents in Canada*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 3,
\$40 Canada; US \$48 United States; US \$56 Other Countries
- Cycle 4 *Quality of Work in the Service Sector*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 6,
\$40 Canada; US \$48 United States; US \$56 Other Countries
- Cycle 4 *Human resource challenges of education, computers and retirement*
GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No. 7,
\$40 Canada; US \$48 United States; US \$56 Other Countries

survey, 1997 being the first year when there will not be any data collection.

2.2 FEATURES

This section briefly describes basic features of the GSS which are common across all survey cycles.

2.2.1 Content

To meet the stated objectives, the content of GSS is made up of three components: *Classification, Core and Focus*.

Classification content consists of variables which provide the means of delineating population groups and for use in the analysis of Core and Focus data. Examples of classification variables are age, sex, education and income.

Core content is intended to obtain information which monitors long-term social trends by measuring temporal changes in living conditions and well-being. Main topic areas for core content include social support, time use, personal risk, work and education and the family. All Core content areas cannot be treated adequately in each survey cycle. Instead, each cycle covers a specific Core content area, which recurs on a periodic basis, usually every five years. Figure 1 shows the content by cycle until 1998.

Figure 1: GSS Content Coverage

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Data Collection</i>	<i>Main Core content</i>	<i>Focus Issue</i>
1	1985	Health	Social Support
2	1986	Time Use, Social Mobility	Language
3	1988	Personal Risk	Victim services
4	1989	Education and Work	No Focus Issue
5	1990	Family and friends	No Focus Issue
6	1991	Health	Various health topics
7	1992	Time Use	Culture, Sport and Unpaid Work Activities

8	1993	Personal Risk	Alcohol and drug use
9	1994	Education, Work and Retirement	Transition into retirement
10	1995	Family	Effects of Tobacco Smoke
11	1996	Social Support	Tobacco Use
12	1998	Time Use	To be determined

Focus content is aimed at meeting the second objective of GSS, namely to provide information touching directly on a specific policy, issue or social problem for example, second-hand smoke. This does not imply that Core content has little relevance to policy questions and social issues. However, in comparison to Focus content, Core content is not principally driven by short term policy issues, but rather provides the means for monitoring and analysis of important aspects of behaviour and living conditions of Canadians over the long term. Focus content, in general, is not expected to be repeated on a periodic basis.

While resources for Classification and Core content are included as part of Statistics Canada's budget, costs associated with Focus content are recovered from sponsors.

2.2.2 COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Telephone interviewing plays a major role in collection of data by GSS. This collection methodology is attractive because of lower collection, sample design and maintenance costs, as well as a considerable flexibility with respect to sample design and size changes. Furthermore, centralized data collection should allow better monitoring and control of costs and data quality. Less than three percent of households in the ten provinces do not have telephones.

Nevertheless, phone interviewing does have some drawbacks: non-coverage of households, while low, is concentrated in population groups with low education attainment or income; response rates tend to be lower than for face-to-face interviews, and there are limitations on the amount and type of data which can be collected. Alternative collection methods may be more appropriate than phone interviewing for particular population groups and for particular types of data. Thus, GSS is not being confined to a single collection methodology.

The sample size of each cycle of the GSS is approximately 10,000 households, with the majority of data collected in non-proxy² mode from one person per household. This sample is allocated across

² Cycles 6 and 11 allowed data to be collected by proxy mode in cases where for health reasons an interview was not possible (both Cycles 6 and 11) or in cases where language was a barrier (Cycle 6 only).

the ten provinces in order to improve the scope of regional estimates, even at some expense to national estimates. In some cycles sample size has been increased - Cycles 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11.

2.2.3 OUTPUTS

The GSS provides four main types of outputs:

a) A series of *publications* which present national and some regional level summary data primarily in the form of tables and charts, as well as initial analyses and findings. An important goal of this series is to display the range of survey data and to indicate the potential for further data analysis and research by others.

b) *Public Use Microdata Files*, together with supporting documentation, which will facilitate the use of GSS data by governments, universities, institutes, business, media and the general public. These files contain individual records, screened to ensure confidentiality, which permit detailed analyses, for example, by occupation, by education or by five-year age groups. Files are available on 9-track tape, tape cartridge and diskettes, or on CD Rom, (at an additional cost).

c) *Special request tabulation and analyses*, primarily on a cost recovery basis. These are intended for users who do not have suitable computer facilities for manipulating the Micro data files, do not wish to purchase the Micro data files, or have specific requests not satisfied by published products.

d) *Special studies* which illuminate aspects of the system used to develop, collect process and analyse the General Social Survey data.

3.0 STATUS

This section summarizes progress to date for Cycles 1 to 12.

3.1 CYCLE 1

Initial work on Cycle 1 started in August 1984. Classification content to be used for this and subsequent cycles was identified. Core content on health covered short and long term disability, well-being, height and weight, health problems, smoking, alcohol use, physical activity, sleep and use of health care services. Focus content, concentrating on the elderly included potential support networks, support received and given and social activities.

Questionnaires, procedures and manuals were produced for a pilot survey in March 1985

which was carried out through Toronto and Vancouver Regional Offices. A small field test to assess French versions of the questionnaires was mounted in May in Montreal. Interviewing for the main Cycle 1 sample took place across the ten provinces in September and October 1985. Persons aged 15 to 64 yearsold were interviewed by phone, with persons 65 years and older interviewed face-to-face.

Cycle 1 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public Use Microdata File	January 1987	\$750 Canada US\$750 Other Countries
<i>Health and Social Support, 1985 (GSS Analysis Series, 11-612E, No.1)</i>	January 1988	Out of Print

3.2 CYCLE 2

Core content development for Cycle 2 was initiated in August 1985, when the topic of "personal risk" was proposed. This topic covers risk from accidents, crime and the environment, that is, risk to a person from outside (the person) sources. However, in December 1985, a decision was taken to delay the personal risk Core content component. Core content on Time Use and Social Mobility, intended for a later cycle, was moved forward as a replacement. The new Core content covered the topics of daily activities done on own and with other, inter- and intra-generational mobility, and personal well-being. A consortium of clients sponsored language knowledge and use as the topic for Focus content.

A pilot survey in July and August 1986 was carried out through the Montreal and Winnipeg Regional Offices for the main Cycle 2 sample (10,000 households across 10 provinces) was done, solely by telephone, in November and December 1986. An additional sample of approximately 6,000 households, was interviewed by telephone during the same period and using the same questionnaires, except for the exclusion of the section on daily activities. This additional sample was concentrated in areas of New Brunswick, Québec and Ontario where there are significant proportions of both official language groups. Both sample selected only persons who were 15 years of age or older.

Cycle 2 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COSTS</i>
Public Use Microdata file	December 1989	\$750 Canada US\$750 Other Countries

<i>Where does time go?</i> (GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No.4)	August 1991	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries
<i>Ups and downs on the ladder of success: Social Mobility in Canada</i> (GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No.5)	December 1991	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries

3.3 CYCLE 3

Core content for Cycle 3 was on personal risk, with primary emphasis on exposure to accidents and crime. Focus content, sponsored by the Department of Justice, was on services to victims of crime.

A pilot survey was carried out through Halifax and Montreal Regional Offices in June and July 1987. Interviewing by telephone for the main Cycle 3 sample, of approximately 10,000 households, was done in January and February 1988. As in previous cycles, only persons 15 years of age or older were selected.

A small scale reinterview survey was introduced in Cycle 3 in order to obtain some consistency measures, primarily for Classification content variables.

Cycle 3 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public Use Microdata file	May 1989	\$750 Canada US\$750 Other Countries
<i>Patterns of Criminal Victimization in Canada</i> (GSS Analysis Series, 11-612E, No.2)	April 1990	\$38 Canada US \$46 Other Countries
<i>Accidents in Canada</i> (GSS Analysis Series, 11-612E, No.3)	February 1991	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries

3.4 CYCLE 4

Development of Core content for Cycle 4, targeted at work and education. Three main themes underlie this content: work and education in the service economy, new technologies and human resources, and emerging trends in education and work. A small module on

knowledge and attitudes to science and technology was also included.

A pilot survey was carried out through Halifax and Montreal Regional Offices in July and August 1988. Interviewing by telephone for the main Cycle 4 sample survey, of approximately 10,000 households, was done in January and February, 1989. In March a reinterview survey, containing a small subset of the questions asked in the main survey, was conducted in two regional offices. The primary aim of this reinterview survey was to obtain consistency measures for selected Core content variables.

Cycle 4 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public Use Microdata File	July 1990	\$750 Canada US \$750 Other Countries
<i>Quality of Work in the Service Sector</i> (GSS Analysis Series 11-612E, No.6)	March 1992	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries
<i>Human resource challenges of education, computers and retirement</i> (GSS Analysis Series 11-612E No.7)	August 1992	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries

3.5 CYCLE 5

Core content for Cycle 5 concentrated on the respondent's family friends and the relationships and interactions with them. The content drew heavily on the 1984 Family History Survey for birth and marriage/cohabitation history questions and on the social support sections of GSS Cycle 1 (1985 Survey). Some comparisons are possible with both of these earlier surveys.

A pilot survey was carried out in Halifax and Montreal in August 1989 and the main survey was conducted over the January to March 1990 period. The Seniors Secretariat, Health and Welfare Canada and the Ontario Department of Community and Social Services have funded additional sample for the population 65 and over across Canada and for the entire population in Ontario. Total sample size was approximately 14,000.

Cycle 5 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public Use Microdata File	June 1991	\$750 Canada US\$750 Other Countries
<i>Family and friends</i> (GSS Analysis Series, 11-612E, No. 9)	August 1994	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries

3.6 CYCLE 6

Cycle 6 marked the first repeat of the GSS core subject areas. Most of the core content of Cycle 6 repeated that of Cycle 1 (1985). As well, much of the core content was included in the Canada Health Survey (1978/79). The three surveys can be used to measure changes in health status over time.

Focus content was diffuse: flu vaccinations, and emotional health measures sponsored by various divisions of Health and Welfare Canada and a health state classification system sponsored internally by the Analytical Studies Branch of Statistics Canada.

The questions and associated procedures were successfully field tested in August, in Halifax, Montreal and Toronto. Data collection for Cycle 6 began the third week of January 1991 and continued to the second week of December 1991. The sample was evenly distributed over the 12 months to counterbalance seasonal variation. Data collection took place from 5 regional offices: Halifax, Montreal, Sturgeon Falls, Winnipeg and Vancouver. The sample size was approximately 11,500 respondents. This includes an oversample of 1,500 respondents by the Seniors Secretariat of Health and Welfare Canada. All interviewing was done by telephone.

In addition to the survey, two special projects were conducted. A feasibility pilot test of longitudinal data collection procedures was conducted in September 1991 and involved households that had participated in the 1990 GSS Cycle 5 Survey on Family and friends. Although the pilot test proved successful, any future longitudinal component will be contingent on funding support.

The second project involved a reinterview study. The principal focus of this study was a series of questions newly developed by researchers at McMaster University and intended to classify individuals along a continuum of health status. Other objectives of the reinterview were: to measure the quality of data obtained from the main survey; to measure the response variance of respondents, i.e., the extent to which respondents "changed" their answers from day to day; and to measure changes in the respondents' health.

Cycle 6 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public Use Microdata File	June 1992	\$750 Canada US \$750 Other Countries
<i>Health Status of Canadians</i> (GSS Analysis Series, 11-612E, No. 8)	March 1994	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries

3.7 CYCLE 7

Core content for Cycle 7 was again time use, first covered in the 1986 GSS. The diary approach used in Cycle 2 was repeated. Coding of activities was expanded. A particular objective of the cycle was the measurement of unpaid work including domestic work, childcare, volunteer work, etc. Also included were questions to measure participation in sport and cultural activities. These questions were sponsored by Sports Canada, and various government departments and cultural organizations.

A pilot test was carried out in Halifax and Montreal in July 1991. The sample size for the survey was approximately 10,000 respondents. Of these, approximately 9,000 respondents answered the questions in the time use diary. Interviewing was conducted throughout 1992 with the interviews spread equally over the 12 months.

Cycle 7 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public Use Microdata File	August 1993	\$750 Canada US \$750 Other Countries
<i>As time goes by...</i> <i>Time use of Canadians</i> (Catalogue No. 89-544E)	December 1995	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries

3.8 CYCLE 8

The 1993 GSS again covered the topic of personal risk including both accidents and criminal

victimization. Focus content for Cycle 8 was alcohol and drug use which was sponsored by the Health Promotion Directorate of Health and Welfare Canada. Cycle 8 marked the first time that GSS collected data using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing(CATI). With CATI, the survey questions appear on a computer monitor. The interviewer asks the respondent the questions, then enters the responses directly into the computer. Built in edits are programmed into CATI therefore resulting in better quality of data.

The survey was developed during the first half of 1992 and field tested during the summer of 1992 in Halifax and Montreal. Data collection began in February 1993 and continued throughout the calendar year to December, 1993 in four regional offices: Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Responses were obtained from 10,385 respondents for a total response rate of 82%. All interviewing was done by telephone.

Cycle 8 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Initial Data Release	June 1994	\$5 Canada
Trends in Criminal Victimization: 1988-1993		US \$6 United States US \$7 Other Countries
Juristat Catalogue No. 85-002 Vol. 14, No. 13		
Public Use Microdata File	August 1994	\$1,500 Canada US \$1,500 Other Countries
Tables on Victimization Product No. 12F0042XPE	December 1994	\$40 Canada US \$48 United States US \$56 Other Countries
Urban/Rural Criminal Victimization in Canada Juristat Catalogue No. 85-002 Vol. 14, No. 17	December 1994	\$5 Canada US \$6 United States US \$7 Other Countries
Public Perceptions of Crime Juristat Catalogue No. 85-002 Vol. 15, No.1	January 1995	\$5 Canada US \$6 United States US \$7 Other Countries
Risk of Personal and Household Victimization: Canada, 1993 Juristat Catalogue No. 85-002 Vol.15, No. 2	January 1995	\$5 Canada US \$6 United States US \$7 Other Countries
Victims Use of Police and	March 1995	\$5 Canada

Social Services Juristat Catalogue No.85-002 Vol. 15, No. 6		US \$6 United States US \$7 Other Countries
Fear and Personal Safety Juristat Catalogue No.85-002 Vol. 15, No. 9	March 1995	\$5 Canada US \$6 United States US \$7 Other Countries
The Justice Data Factfinder Juristat Catalogue No. 85-002 Vol 16, No.9	July 1996	\$10 Canada US \$12 United States US \$14 Other Countries

3.9 CYCLE 9

Core content for Cycle 9 was education, work and retirement, first covered in the 1989 GSS. Focus content for Cycle 9 covered transition into retirement and post-retirement activities. Also included were questions to measure social mobility, a topic covered in Cycle 2. The base sample size for Cycle 9 was 10,000, with a supplementary sample of 1,500 people aged 55 to 74 years old selected from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) rotate-outs. As in Cycle 8, a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system was used to collect the information.

The pilot test for Cycle 9 was conducted during the autumn of 1993 in Statistics Canada's regional offices of Halifax and Montreal. Data collection for the survey itself began in January 1994. Data were collected monthly, over the period January 1994 to December 1994 inclusive, taking place from 4 regional offices - Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Responses were obtained from 11,876 respondents for a response rate of 81.2%.

Cycle 9 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Fact sheet on computer use in the workplace	June 1995	Available on Internet http://www.statcan.ca
Public use microdata file	September 1995	\$ 1,500 Canada US \$1,500 Other Countries
Fact sheet on age at retirement : different perspective for men and women	September 1995	Available on Internet http://www.statcan.ca

Canada's Changing Retirement Patterns: Findings from the General Social Survey
 Catalogue no. 89-546-XPE

September 1996

\$37.00 Canada
 US\$45.00 United States
 US\$52.00 Other Countries

3.10 CYCLE 10

Cycle 10 focused on Canadian families. This theme, in conjunction with the theme relating to social support and social networks was also covered in Cycle 5. The increased interest in these two themes and their complexities has made their processing difficult within one survey. As a result, each theme was covered under a separate survey. Help and social support formed the core content for Cycle 11.

More specifically, Cycle 10 collected data on family and marital history (marriage and common-law relationships), joint custody arrangements, child leaving, family origins, fertility intentions, values and attitudes towards certain areas of family life, and work interruptions. In addition to the core content, Cycle 10 included two focus themes: the effects of environmental tobacco smoke, and wartime service, which targets persons aged 55 and over.

A pilot test was carried out in the Montreal and Winnipeg regional offices in August 1994. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing. The sample size for the survey was approximately 11,250 respondents, which includes an additional sample of 1,250 respondents sponsored by the province of Quebec. Data were collected monthly from January to December 1995 in the Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver Regional Offices. Data collection for the additional sample started in May and was spread equally over the remaining months.

Cycle 10 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Fact sheet <i>Canadian Families: Diversity & Change</i>	June 1996	Available on Internet http://www.statcan.ca
Public use microdata file	January 1997	\$1,500 Canada US \$1,500 Other Countries

3.11 CYCLE 11

The first (1985) and sixth cycles (1991) of the GSS had 'health' as their core. With the introduction of the National Population Health Survey in 1994, there was no longer a need to collect data in the 'health' core subject area. This allowed for a new core to be introduced and 'social support' was proposed. Social support, though, was not a new topic for the GSS as it received coverage in the first cycle and again in the fifth cycle (core = family).

The objectives and scope of Cycle 11 were: to understand the dynamic between an individual's social network and help received and provided, and to determine the nature of the help received and provided. A "social network" is comprised of the individual's spouse, family, close friends, neighbours, co-worker or any organizations (composed of either volunteers or paid employees) that revolve around an individual. The 1996 GSS focused on help given or received during either temporarily difficult times or out of necessity due to long-term health or physical limitations in daily activities either inside or outside the household.

Cycle 11 used the following approach to collect this information: a screening section established a "help roster" which was comprised of the help provided to the respondent due to the respondent's long-term health or physical limitations, and the receivers of help from the respondent due to the receiver's long-term health or physical limitations. Four major groups of instrumental activities of daily living were asked about to establish the "help roster". They are: 1) child-care; 2) meal preparation and cleanup; house cleaning, laundry and sewing; house maintenance and outside work; 3) shopping for groceries or other necessities; transportation; banking and bill paying; and 4) personal care. Also, persons/organizations receiving/giving care such as "checking up" or "providing emotional support" were added to the roster, however, there was no detailed follow-up. Detailed information on episodic help due to temporary difficult times was also collected in the screen though no rostering is done of help receivers/providers.

Data collection began in February 1996, and continued monthly through December 1996. CAT technology was employed. The regular GSS sample size of 10,000 was supplemented by a national oversample of 1,250 seniors aged 65 and over, (sponsored by the Seniors Directorate, Health Canada) and 700 seniors sampled from the province of Quebec (sponsored by the province of Quebec). These supplemental interviews were drawn from the LFS rotate-outs. In addition, approximately 25% of the regular sample was drawn from LFS rotate-outs and was restricted to seniors aged 65 and over, thereby obtaining more reliable estimates from this group.

Cycle 11 Output

<i>OUTPUT</i>	<i>DATE RELEASED</i>	<i>COST</i>
Public use microdata file	Scheduled for late 1997	TBD

3.12 CYCLE 12

Core content for Cycle 12 will again be time use with data collection in 1998. Developmental work is now underway.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Contact: Jennifer Hubbard, by phone at (613) 951-5979
or by fax at: (613) 951-0387