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RANK AND FILE NEEDS  
AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE :  
A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH NOTE  
ON AN INVESTIGATION IN UMLAZI

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Paper delivered at the  
QUALITY OF LIFE WORKSHOP  
held by the Council for Scientific  
and Industrial Research, Pretoria,  
on 30th November 1979.

I. As Simon Bekker has said, much Quality of Life research in the United States was sponsored in the belief that rational planning or "social engineering" by well-informed bureaucracies could improve the well-being of everyday people, across a large spectrum of their interests and concerns.<sup>1)</sup> This goal is problematic in the United States, a privileged society in which need saturation has occurred in so many of the more easily identified domains of living. In South Africa, however, and particularly among Black Township dwellers whose lives are infinitely more comprehensively affected by the decisions of employers and administrations, appropriate research insights can provide the objectives of reforms to which not only private organisations like The Urban Foundation, but the government itself has committed itself.

Many of the statements of intent by would-be reformers in both the public and private sectors have called forth the criticism that the motives are essentially manipulative ---- the creation of a contented middle-class which will stabilise a system aimed at the control and exploitation of black labour. This argument is problematic and oversimple in many ways, but it is not inappropriately aimed at those whose sole intention is to "buy off" a relatively privileged substratum of the black population. While not completely immune to similar accusations, Quality of Life researchers generally can claim that at least they have invariably studied the perceived needs of entire populations. Representative samples drawn from all strata have been the hallmark of Quality of Life studies.

II. Quality of Life surveys, then, can be very useful as a guide to reform where large numbers of strongly-felt needs are present simultaneously; where community spokesmen and women compete with each other in articulating their views of their own communities' priorities, and where people do not enjoy representation on the bodies that control public funds. As reform proceeds in South Africa, so the ranks of community spokesmen and women will be swelled by more and more people who see prospects of reaping some benefits, either for themselves, for organisations with which they are associated, or in many cases, for their whole communities. Spokesmen leaders, however, inevitably tend to be better-educated or else tend to be drawn from the ranks of "joiners" of Church groups, special interest associations and the like. They are important people but their perceptions of

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1) Simon Bekker. "Measuring the Quality of Life" Paper presented at the workshop on the Quality of Life. Rhodes University, August 1979.

priorities need not always be typical. Studies of needs based on representative samples can help to balance the perspectives of these more prominent people.

Quality of Life surveys themselves can be misleading, however. Firstly, the needs expressed through the population surveys must be interpreted in the light of objective social indicators. Even a wealthy population at a time of rising costs can make a fetish of standards of living, so the latter must be taken into account in assessing "real" needs. Objective indicators must not be over-emphasised, however, since the fuel of active discontent is expectations rather than objective circumstances. A critical period as far as the potential for unconstructive and self-defeating political unrest is concerned is a slowdown after a period of rising fortunes.<sup>2)</sup> Relative Deprivation is the critical sentiment, and it is subjective rather than objective. In the long run, a broad correlation with objective circumstances must exist, but politics are seldom a response to longer range processes. Quality of Life surveys promise to tell us about relative deprivation, because of their emphasis on representative felt needs.

A second reason why Quality of Life surveys can be misleading is precisely the reason why one should never overlook the claims and protests of spokesmen leaders — ordinary people are not always able to articulate or even recognise some of the problems which press them hardest. More articulate or reflective members of communities however, may recognise such problems much more clearly. This is one reason why even the most sympathetic, probing, open-ended questioning in surveys can fail to uncover hidden discontents. Depth interviews or participant observation might but these are scarcely practical. We will attempt to show in due course, however, that employing certain techniques of questioning and analysis can yield valid results of meaningful depth in a survey research format.

Above all, perhaps, Quality of Life surveys are misleading unless interpreted. Quantified results are not to be used as a drunkard uses a lamp post — for support rather than light. The percentages do not stand by themselves as absolute measures of some collective sentiment or another. The results must be interpreted in context — a

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2) T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton University Press, 1970.

context of time, the agency conducting the research, the patience and sympathy of interviewers — and with full awareness that some complaints are more easily expressed than others. People complain about the cost of living as part of an easy social ritual, but are far more reticent in complaining about neighbours or governments.

III. At the request of The Urban Foundation (Natal Region) we have undertaken a survey of the Quality of Life among Africans, Indians and whites in greater-Durban. Interviews, initially intended to average one-hour, exceeded three to four hours each in duration (the difference also being a rough measure of the project overdraft and the deterioration in the Quality of Life of the director of this Centre). It was no survey, then, but a large number of semi-depth structured interviews. Nothing less could yield results which would have been any meaningful advance on previous studies based on survey-type interviews or focussed open-ended probing.

It was found to be essential to present respondents with stimuli of various kinds — short statements, incomplete sentences, cardboard models of houses, etc., etc. Without this approach we would have been told little more than that which our black, brown and white fieldworkers already knew. Obviously there is a danger of bias when one presents fixed stimuli. We sought to avoid this bias simply by being exhaustive. Every domain of living and most major aspects of each domain were covered. If bias exists it lies not in selectivity; its form is more subtle and hopefully much less serious than that which normally attends the structured probing of sociologists.

This is an interim report; at this stage completed fieldwork records are being coded for computer analysis. Only the results for one township are ready. This is Umlazi, the largest African township within the metropolitan area of Durban. The results which follow are based on an inter-related 'quota sample' of 90 adult respondents<sup>3)</sup> — this being a subsample of our larger African sample of some 200 persons. Although relatively small, this sample in its basic social characteristics is a cross-section of ages, sexes and statuses of people living in Umlazi.

The results which follow represent an attempt to discover what the

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3) 18 years +

most salient felt needs for improvement in Quality of Life are among people in Umlazi. Not all the data have been analysed for this brief preliminary report. Aspects of the interview covering self-confidence, morale, housing and community life and other topics will be discussed in later reports. This research note is intended as a broad guide to the felt priorities and needs as regards life in general.

#### IV. FELT PRIORITY AREAS AND SATISFACTION WITHIN THEM

A major operation in the research was presenting each respondent with an exhaustive list of statements describing needs. One-hundred and forty eight items were read to respondents and they were asked to choose which needs were of top importance in their lives — the very greatest importance. As expected, far too many items were selected; the respondents enjoyed indulging themselves. Through successive follow-up readings, asking respondents to eliminate all but the very most important issues, a final choice of 30 items per respondent was arrived at.

On the final items selected respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they were very satisfied in the needs, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In Table I we present the thirty items with the greatest percentage selection on the final round, as well as the percentage of those choosing the item who were satisfied or strongly satisfied in their expectations regarding the issue in question. For interest sake we also present the 30 items with the lowest percentage selection.

TABLE I.

LIFE CONCERNS RECEIVING THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST PERCENTAGE SELECTION IN TERMS OF IMPORTANCE FOR RESPONDENTS, AND DEGREE OF FELT NEED SATISFACTION ON EACH ISSUE: UMLAZI ADULT RESPONDENTS (n = 90)

LIFE CONCERN* <i>Highest Percentage Choice out of 148 items, in Descending Order</i>	Proportion of Total sample selecting life-concern among the top 30 choices	Percentage of those selecting item expressing satisfaction on issue in question
	%	%
1. Well-paid work	71	41
2. Respect from children	69	93
3. Ability to provide for children	64	47
4. Having a good education	62	46
5. Sufficient good food	60	42
6. Sufficient money	59	15
7. Family living together	58	90
8. Security of residence	57	47
9. Harmony within family	54	78

Continued/

TABLE I. Continued

LIFE CONCERN* <i>Highest Percentage Choice out of 148 items, in Descending Order</i>	Proportion of Total sample selecting life-concern among the top 30 choices	Percentage of those selecting item expressing satisfaction on issue in question
	%	%
10. Reasonable rents	53	25
11. Reasonable food prices	52	4
12. House of sufficient size	49	27
13. More houses available	49	9
14. Fair wages	48	44
15. Good education for children	48	42
16. Owning house in town	47	83
17. Healthy family	46	39
18. Financial security for family on death or illness	44	40
19. Strong, solid house	42	19
20. Running water in home	42	84
21. Pension	40	44
22. Progress in occupation	40	78
23. Belief in God	39	94
24. Good health	39	49
25. Secure marriage	34	93
26. Affectionate spouse	34	97
27. Controlled obedient children	34	97
28. Children properly supervised	34	68
29. Providence from children when old	33	83
30. Privacy inside home	33	33

*Lowest Percentage choice in Descending Order*

118. A say in running of community	4	N.A
119. Good relations with kin	4	"
120. Polygamy	3	"
121. Being esteemed in community	3	"
123. Visiting relatives	3	"
124. Feeling self-confident	3	"
125. Having fun in life	2	"
126. Living in Exciting, interesting environment	2	"
127. Being consulted at work	2	"
128. Knowing what to expect in life	2	"
129. Parks in area	2	"
130. A house admired by others	2	"
131. Work of status	1	"
132. Visiting friends	1	"
133. Making beautiful things (homecraft)	1	"
134. Spectator sport	1	"
135. Ability to impress others	1	"
136. Drinking with friends	1	"
137. Varied spare time activity	1	"
138. Having television	1	"
139. Going out often	1	"
140. Good acquaintance with neighbours	0	"
141. Integration with peer group	0	"
142. Participation sport	0	"
143. More leisure time	0	"
144. Not feeling inferior to others	0	"
145. Admired personality	0	"
146. Large number of children	0	"
148. Ability to choose work	0	"

\* Note: Items presented to respondents have been paraphrased for the sake of brevity

The results in Table I allow one to compute a combined index of importance and satisfaction, with the higher scores representing concerns which are most important but least satisfying — an index of felt privation. This we achieve by dividing the percentage adjudging the item to be among the 30 most important by the percentage expressing satisfaction. Illustrative results are as follows:

Most serious felt need:	<i>food prices</i>	13,0
	<i>housing shortage</i>	5,4
	<i>incomes</i>	3,9
	<i>strength and durability of housing</i>	2,2
	<i>rentals</i>	2,1
	<i>size of houses</i>	1,8
	<i>wages</i>	1,7
	<i>adequacy of food</i>	1,4
	<i>provision for children</i>	1,4
	<i>good education</i>	1,3
	<i>security of residence</i>	1,2
	<i>family health</i>	1,2
	<i>children's education</i>	1,1
	<i>financial insurance in case of misfortune</i>	1,1
	<i>privacy inside home</i>	1,0

The results in Table I above, in a broad sense, provide overwhelming confirmation of the well-known theory of needs of Maslow.<sup>4)</sup> Our respondents, who were poor people generally, experience their needs at very basic levels — material welfare, security, health, family integration and shelter, with religious faith probably serving to bolster expectations in a world of some considerable privation. Generally job-advancement and education are the only needs with more active, surgent connotations, but even these are probably largely instrumental and pragmatic in nature.

Clearly aesthetic, expressive and self-actualising needs are prepotent, as are status needs, needs for community solidarity and political needs. While many respondents subscribed to these latter values in the first selection of items, perhaps on grounds of fashion and "social desirability", these concerns could not withstand the strength of more basic commitments in the final choices.

When one considers the great emphasis placed on family integration, solidarity and discipline, one realises to what extent migrant labour and the separation of family members must strike to the heart of everyday commitments.

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4) A.H. Maslow, "Higher and Lower Needs", *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 25, 1948, pp. 433-436.

The sample from Umlazi, however, when judged according to levels of felt satisfaction, are in some ways privileged at these basic levels. Family life, rental or ownership of houses (albeit small and unsubstantial) are obviously highly valued and a source of satisfaction. Middle-class concerns about the drab appearance and tedium of life in the townships appear to have little salience for our respondents.

This is not to say that severe felt deprivation does not exist. The listing of felt privation accords well with objective knowledge. We note that standards of living, material security, insurance against misfortune, education and the availability and practical suitability of housing are issues which militate most strongly against the quality of life. These are the 'hard' rank-and-file priorities.

Yet are these indeed the only salient concerns? Does this type of analysis not perhaps yield only concerns of a more overt or easily and consciously recognisable kind? Are there not perhaps hidden deprivations? To try and answer these questions forms of indirect analysis are necessary.

#### V. HIDDEN PRIORITIES

Several further approaches to the analysis of our data are being made, some of which can be discussed at this stage.

One of the ways in which the data can be explored for covert meanings is to examine each item to see whether or not it relates significantly to overall life satisfaction. People may not be aware of the link — they may not even be aware of a specific discontent of very great significance, yet some covert anxiety associated with the particular issue could contribute indirectly to a general discontent. In Table II we present results in which responses to specific items are related to generalised life-satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Our tests of general life satisfaction included a probe in which people were presented with five faces, each with an associated description matching the expression on the face, ranging from "*very happy about life*" to "*really very unhappy about life*". In the table specific life concerns which received small percentage selections in the final selection of 30 most important items are omitted. Furthermore, only items for which relationships are significant have been included.

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TABLE II.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORE SALIENT LIFE CONCERNS AND  
GENERAL LIFE SATISFACTION : UMLAZI ADULTS (n=90)

Life Concern	Statistical Significance of Relationship between <u>Satisfaction on specific Life Concern and Overall Life Satisfaction</u> (corrected $\chi^2$ , p,05 or less is significant)	Statistical Significance of Relationship between of Relationship between felt Importance of specific Life Concern and overall Life Satisfaction (corrected $\chi^2$ )
Adequate provision for children	p,001	not significant
Education expenses	p,04	"
Fair wages	p,02	"
Running water in house	p,05	"
More houses	p,02	"
Adequate good food	p,01	"
Knowing what to expect from life	p,03	"
Interesting spare time activity	p,0002	"
Trust in surrounding people	p,05	"
Able to have fun in life	p,002	"
Participation in religious activities	not significant	p,05
Belief in God	"	p,01
Disinterest in equality with whites	"	p,002
Police protection of area	"	p,04
House people admire	"	p,05

The first six items in Table II reinforce the results in the listing of key areas of deprivation which followed the analysis in Table I. The correlations between satisfaction or lack of it in specific areas of life concern and overall life satisfaction highlight the following hard priorities for reform among the rank-and-file in Umlazi: Wages, housing, food, education and the ability and opportunity to provide for children.

Further results in Table II, however suggest that hidden relationships between other areas of life concern and general discontent. These areas, as we expected, are generally difficult to articulate and even to recognise, and hence very difficult to complain about. The importance of religion as a hedge against discontent appears clearly (the "panacea of the masses", as is so often argued). Quality of recreation and a feeling of rapport and trust with surrounding people are also significantly associated with overall life satisfaction. The results also suggest that those who are concerned with social order and safety, and those who are concerned with the status significance of their homes tend to be more conservative in their expectations, evincing significantly greater overall life satisfaction. As would be expected

those who are less-interested in equality with whites also have lower expectations (less relative deprivation) and hence tend to be more satisfied with life in general.

VI. LIFE-CONCERN PROFILE OF THE TWO POLAR GROUPS — THE VERY CONTENTED AND THE VERY DISCONTENTED.

Movements of social protest, or of active support for the system, are seldom engaged in by the broad masses (except in times of crisis). Generally those whose feelings of discontentment or satisfaction are rather extreme tend to create the social action, as it were. For this reason, finally, it is of interest briefly to consider the Life-Concern profiles of these two polar groups in our sample. The results, which appear in Table III, are tentative at this stage since they are based on the small numbers available in our subsample of Umlazi. The results are presented simply to explore the possibility that one may have widely divergent aspirations in a typical African township.

TABLE III.

LIFE CONCERNS WHICH ARE UNIQUE TO THOSE WHO RATE THEMSELVES AS EITHER VERY HAPPY OR VERY UNHAPPY WITH LIFE IN GENERAL

<u>VERY HAPPY</u> Items selected by over 40% of the Happy Group but not by the unhappy group	<u>VERY UNHAPPY</u> Items selected by over 40% of the Unhappy Group but not by the happy group
Belief in God	Financial security in case of family death or illness
Good pension	Job security
Participation in religious activities	Happiness within family
Proud of being Zulu	Privacy in the home
Ability to send children to school of choice	Secure marriage
Owning a house in town	Good education for children
Adequate supervision of children	Healthy family
More houses available	Ability to reach personal goals
Sufficient money in old age	Better roads

Before commenting specifically on the results in Table III, we should note that a perusal of results not presented shows that both 'extreme' groups tend to select the same most important life concerns as the general sample (see Table I). Broadly, it seems that they subscribe to the general view of life priorities. Table III does show, however, that life circumstances and perceptions of opportunity are divergent for the 'happy' and 'unhappy' groups in certain ways. The 'very happy' persons emphasise the importance of religious association, ethnicity, the ability to supervise and educate their children, housing and old age security. The 'unhappy' group by contrast,

is more generally concerned with security : in marriage, jobs and in the event of misfortune. Family-centred items are also very important in the 'unhappy' group, as is the desire for personal achievement.

From a knowledge of our data we know that the 'happy' group achieved remarkably high levels of satisfaction on the items uniquely selected by the group, whereas very unhappy persons were by and large dissatisfied with their situation in the areas of living selected uniquely by them.

Very broadly these results suggest that the highly discontented group is not necessarily a highly politicised group as we would have expected, but tends rather to be a group of people who may be very anxious about what they see as underachievement of personal life goals.

#### VII. DISCUSSION.

Throughout the preceding analysis we have accepted the choice of life-concerns as independent values in our sample. It may very well be, however, that the choice of life domains as important may be strongly affected by success or failure in the achievement of satisfaction. Perhaps some people tend to 'withdraw' from commitment to issues where there is no chance of gratification while others may emphasise the importance of the very issues which frustrate them. Answers to these questions have to await the analysis of results from our larger sample.

The results in some instances illustrate the need for careful interpretation of the pattern of responses. The reader will recall that the item "having fun in life" was selected as important in the final round by only two per cent of the sample (Table I), but that the degree of satisfaction on this issue (when probed separately) correlated very significantly with overall life satisfaction (Table II). What of other issues which for reasons of time and funds could not be probed separately? Possibly some of these issues might also exercise hidden effects even though they are not of manifest importance to the sample.

Then again, in some cases the importance or possible social rewards connected with some issue or another might not be recognised simply because the people have no experience of it. With poor black people this could apply to "having television", "a say in running the community", "being consulted at work", "parks in area" and other benefits not freely enjoyed by blacks up to now. For this reason, a final interpretation of the results must await the

comparison of results from black samples with the results from more privileged white respondents, currently being analysed.

Many of these difficulties will be resolved when the full range of findings for Africans, whites and Indians is available for analysis. Some problems of assessment will remain, however, and only very careful interpretation and reference to objective social indicators in the communities involved will be an effective safeguard against misleading conclusions in some respects.

In general the pattern of responses shows clearly that most of the needs of rank-and-file black people are very basic and utilitarian in nature. One must anticipate, however, that as these basic needs are gratified more complex wants connected with status, power and self-actualisation will emerge. For this reason social reform must be an ongoing and cumulative process.

In the meantime, however, the Umlazi results offer some basis for preliminary comments about attempts to improve the quality of urban life for blacks. Broadly our results support many of the ongoing attempts by public and private bodies to improve the situation of urban blacks as regards education, housing, employment and standards of living, but they also indicate that the pace of reform needs to be quickened in many respects.

Our study certainly confirms the importance which a body like The Urban Foundation, for example, has assigned to the challenge of housing. Our results show, however, that the emphasis should be on simplicity, low-cost durability, roominess and flexibility of design to facilitate internal privacy for large households rather than on venturesome designs intended to introduce elements of status and aesthetic appeal in housing. At this stage it would seem that for the rank-and-file, status needs as regards housing are not primary. Our tentative impressions at this stage are that the appearance of a house is judged in terms of functional adequacy.

The emphasis on food prices and on costs of living generally would suggest a great need for large discount stores in townships, offering a wide range of food and other everyday items at low cost close to the residents' homes. The KwaZulu Government 'Tri-partite' company policy is one of a type which would allow this type of development without the opportunities all going to large white-owned discount houses. It should be possible for smaller African businessmen, whose livelihood and profits would be threatened by these developments, to form consortiums to participate in larger discount ventures.

The great emphasis placed on security across a wide variety of domains (family security in times of misfortune, security in old age, financial insurance for the family in the case of death, illness, etc.); a need which is emphasised by the fact that the highly discontented group appears to have strong anxieties in this regard, raises a challenge which is difficult to meet. We do not pretend to have any expert knowledge in this field, but we simply raise the question of whether or not private enterprise and the government, acting together, could not put together an attractive insurance package, tailored to the financial resources of the black rank-and-file, which would cover health-costs, unemployment, rental payments, school fees and other essential costs in times of misfortune. Obviously a pension component to augment the standard old-age pensions would also be desirable.

The emphasis placed on incomes, wages, and (by the 'unhappy' group) job security underscores the importance of codes of employment practices and their effective monitoring by various bodies, including The Urban Foundation. The high value accorded to education both for self and for children, and the ability to pay for childrens' education leave no doubt that meaningful reforms in the field of education will have dramatic effects on rank-and-file black people. In this regard the critical problem of the lack of availability of trained black teaching staff indicates that certain key educational services should be made available on a non-racial basis. The obvious interest in continuing education among adults suggests that well-organised and amply funded part-time educational facilities for employed or unemployed adults will do a great deal to improve morale in the black communities. The mere possibility of having a 'second chance' will mean a great deal in communities in which school drop-out rates are distressingly high.

The needs mentioned above are ones which rank-and-file people can and do talk about. Our analysis also shows, however, that needs for affiliation and diversion are present and may contribute to general life satisfaction, but without the typical township residents or their spokesmen being fully aware of them. For many people in the townships, more interesting leisure-time activities and meaningful participation in collective activities may combat what this study suggests and others show more clearly;<sup>5)</sup> a marked

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5) V. Møller, L. Schlemmer, J. Kuzwayo and B. Mbanda, *A Black Township in Durban: A Study of Needs and Problems*, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, Durban, September 1978.

atomisation of social life. The importance of religion in securing life satisfaction as shown in the present results reflects a need which for the non-religious, has to be gratified in community programmes which will promote a sense of mutual trust, promote the quality of leisure (see Table II) and through this facilitate the development of a stronger social identity.

These last comments emphasise points made in our introduction. The indirect analysis which was able to uncover certain 'hidden' needs, even in such a small sample, shows that research data, if appropriately analysed, can complement the other sources of insights into the Quality of Life in our urban areas. The results given above, while not the final statement from this study, provide a basis for the assessment of major priorities.

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