

International Social Survey Programme

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) involves leading academic institutions in 43 countries in an annual survey of economic and social policy issues. New Zealand is represented in the ISSP by Massey University. Each year the ISSP member countries carry out a 30-minute survey using the same questionnaire. The data from these surveys are deposited in central archives in Cologne and Madrid where they are freely available to all members. This collection of data enables researchers to examine similarities and differences between countries, and to monitor changes over time.

The ISSP addresses a different topic each year in a roughly seven-year cycle. Previous topics have included the roles of men and women in society, social networks, social equality, citizenship, work orientation, the environment, the role of government, national identity and religion. In 2007, the sixteenth year New Zealand has been involved in the ISSP, the topic was Sport and Leisure.

Survey Details

Between October and December 2007 a nationwide mail survey was conducted of 2250 people aged 18 and over, randomly selected from the New Zealand Electoral Roll. The survey produced 990 valid responses, an effective response rate of 49%. A sample of this size has a maximum error margin at the 95% confidence level of approximately plus or minus 3%. Though the sample was representative of a wide spectrum of New Zealand society, young people were under-represented and women were over-represented. To correct these biases the survey data were weighted so that the age-sex distribution of the sample matched that of the New Zealand population.

Leisure Time Activities

The modern notion of leisure time dates from the late nineteenth century when more efficient machinery and the emergence of trade unions gave rise to the Victorian concept of leisure time as we know it today. Leisure covers a wide range of activities from active physical or mental exertion in exercise, sport or the arts, through to passive activities including watching television, reading or simply meeting friends.

Leisure time activities are an important component of a balanced and healthy lifestyle. They play an important role in social wellbeing and contribute to people's personal growth and self-expression. For many people, leisure activities improve their physical and mental health and their overall quality of life. Over the last forty years, leisure time has increased, though this increase has not been spread equally over all groups in society.

In their free time, time when they are not occupied with work, or household duties, or other activities they are obliged to do, New Zealanders take part in a broad spectrum of activities (see Table 1). Prominent among these activities are watching television, listening to music, playing sport, getting together with friends, going shopping, spending time on the Internet and reading books.

Table 1. Leisure Time Activities

	Daily %	Several times a week %	Several times a month %	Several times a year or less often %	Never %
Watch TV, DVD, video	70	23	5	2	1
Listen to music	59	23	10	6	3
Take part in physical activities	26	38	20	12	5
Spend time on the Internet/PC	32	24	15	7	22
Read books	30	18	15	26	11
Get together with friends	7	30	45	17	1
Go out shopping	3	26	46	23	1
Get together with relatives	5	19	36	38	2
Do handcrafts	4	7	12	28	49
Play cards or board games	1	5	17	47	29
Attend sporting events as a spectator	-	3	13	52	32
Go to the movies	-	1	7	70	22

Most respondents (75%) would prefer to spend more time in leisure activities and with their family (68%) than more time in a paid job (17%) or doing housework (15%). Presumably, those who said they would spend more time on these latter activities if they could change the way they spent their time were motivated by economic circumstances or practical need rather than an inherent desire to increase the burden of either.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that, after a lack of time, a lack of money is the biggest barrier to respondents doing the free time activities of their choice. Nearly 70% of those surveyed reported that lack of money prevented them from doing the free time activities they would like to do to some extent, and just under 30% said money was a major barrier. Though lack of facilities nearby, personal health, age or disability, or the need to take care of an elderly relative or children were significant barriers for 12% to 17% of respondents, these were not major issues in general. The irony is that those with the most free time are those for whom lack of money is likely to be a significant barrier to leisure time activities of their choice, and vice versa.

Physical Activity and Games

Eighty-five per cent of New Zealanders are involved in some sort of sport or physical activity. The most frequent of these activities is walking (35% of respondents), but getting fit, going to the gym, cycling, jogging and playing golf or rugby are also activities that many New Zealanders participate in (see Table 2). Predictably, the type of sport or physical activity varies depending on age and sex. Walking and getting fit by going to the gym are more common among women than men, active sports such as rugby, and netball are more common among younger people, while walking and playing golf are more prevalent among older people. Most of this physical activity tends to be individual or informal rather than in organized teams.

Table 2. Most Frequent Sport or Physical Activity

Sport or activity	Total %	Men %	Women %	<35 %	35-54 %	55+ %
Walking, hiking	35	21	46	29	36	37
Fitness, going to gym, yoga	8	5	11	9	11	5
Golf	5	6	3	2	4	8
Cycling, mountain biking	4	5	4	4	6	3
Jogging	4	5	3	3	6	1
Rugby, touch rugby	4	6	1	8	3	0
Fishing, hunting	2	5	0	3	2	2
Swimming, diving	2	3	1	1	3	2
Tennis	2	3	2	3	2	2
Football, soccer	2	4	0	4	2	0
Bowls	2	3	1	0	0	7
Netball	1	0	2	4	0	0
Other	13	19	9	17	12	9
Don't take part	16	15	17	13	13	24

Three quarters of New Zealanders also regularly play games. Most popular are word or number games such as crosswords and Sudoku (20% of respondents), but video games and computer games, card games, board games such as Monopoly and Scrabble, and gambling games (for example poker machines, Lotto and sports betting) are also played by between 5% and 15% of people (see Table 3). Again, there are predictable age-sex differences. More women, particularly older women, play word or number games; whereas men, particularly young men, are more likely to play video games and computer games.

Table 3. Game Most Frequently Played

Game	Total %	Men %	Women %	<35 %	35-54 %	55+ %
Word or number games	21	12	28	12	20	30
Video games, computer games, play station	15	23	8	32	11	3
Card games	12	10	13	13	14	8
Board games (e.g., monopoly, scrabble)	9	7	12	12	11	5
Gambling games, lottery, sports betting	5	8	3	6	5	5
Other games	11	11	11	7	13	11
Don't play games	27	29	25	18	26	38

Most New Zealanders (80%) watch sport on television, and of those two-thirds most frequently watch rugby; this applies to both men and women and across all age groups (see Table 4). Thus, despite claims about its declining popularity, rugby is still unrivalled in its appeal to television sports viewers.

Other sports with significant audiences among particular groups are motor sports and football among men, and netball among women. However, despite the popularity of televised sport, 22% of those surveyed agreed there was too much sport on television (36% disagreed and 42% neither agreed nor disagreed).

Table 4. Watching Sport on Television

Most frequent sport watched	Total %	Men %	Women %	<35 %	35-54 %	55+ %
Rugby union	63	64	61	63	64	62
Motor sports	8	11	4	8	10	5
Netball	6	1	11	3	6	8
Football, soccer	5	7	4	5	6	5
Rugby league	4	4	5	9	3	2
Cricket	3	3	3	4	2	2
Golf	3	2	3	0	3	4
Tennis	2	1	4	1	1	4
Other sport	6	7	5	7	5	8

The importance of sport to New Zealanders is emphasized by the fact that more than 90% of respondents, including those who do not play sport or watch it on television, feel proud when New Zealand does well in international sport. A similar proportion of respondents believe taking part in sport develops children's character and 75% believe sport brings different groups and races in New Zealand closer together. These positive beliefs about sport may be reflected in the attitude of 40% of respondents who consider that the government should spend more money on sport (30% disagree and 30% are neutral).

Health and Happiness

Generally, New Zealanders consider themselves to be happy and in good health. Less than 10% of respondents said they were unhappy with life in general; 60% said they were fairly happy and 30% very happy. There is no difference in the overall happiness of men and women, but older men and women (55 and older) tend to be less happy than younger people. More than half of respondents (54%) considered their health to be very good or excellent, another 32% described it as good; only 14% rated it as fair or poor. There are no differences in perceived health status between men and women or across age groups.

However, both happiness and health are affected by marital status. People who are married are generally happier than those who are single, who in turn are generally happier than those who are divorced, widowed or separated. This trend is also reflected in perceived health status. Bearing in mind that most New Zealanders describe themselves as happy and healthy, the happiest and healthiest are married men and women, followed by single men and women and divorced, widowed or separated women. The least happy and healthy are divorced, widowed or separated men.

The Ideal Man and Woman

Respondents were presented with four male and four female body shapes (see Figures 1 and 2) and asked which of these pictures came closest to their conception of an ideal shape of a man and woman. The concept of the 'ideal' man was consistent for men and women and across age groups, though among those under 35 there was a tendency to prefer a slightly slimmer body shape than among older respondents. However, for the 'ideal' woman there were some interesting differences of opinion by age and sex.

Figure 1. The Ideal Man

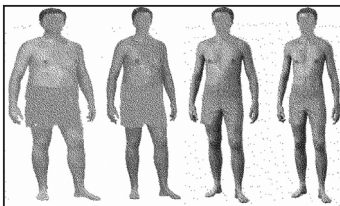
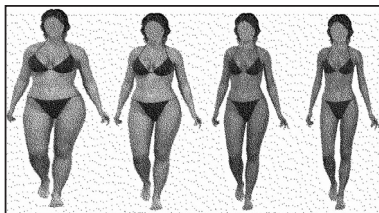
Which of the following pictures comes closest to your conception of an ideal shape of a man?				
	%	%	%	%
Total	1	55	44	1
Sex: Men	1	54	44	1
Women	1	56	42	-
Age : < 35	-	50	49	2
35-54	1	56	43	-
55+	1	57	41	1

Figure 2. The Ideal Woman

Which of the following pictures comes closest to your conception of an ideal shape of a woman?				
	%	%	%	%
Total	2	47	50	1
Sex: Men	2	54	43	1
Women	2	47	52	1
Age : < 35	1	35	62	2
35-54	2	49	50	-
55+	3	56	41	1

Overall the ‘ideal’ woman is generally seen as being slimmer than the ‘ideal’ man, but this difference is not very marked. More significantly, women tend to choose a slimmer body shape than men as ‘ideal’. This preference for a slimmer body shape is also more pronounced among younger people than older people, particularly among young women.

These ideal body shape perceptions are mirrored in respondents’ preferences for gaining or losing weight (see Table 5). Fifty-four percent of those surveyed said they would like to lose weight, but women are much more likely to want to lose weight than men. Middle-aged respondents, both men and women between 35 and 54, are more likely to want to lose weight than either older or younger members of the same sex. The most concerned about losing weight are middle-aged women, the least concerned are young males (in fact, the latter are more likely than other groups to be concerned with putting on weight).

Table 5. Preference for Weight

Would like to ...	Total %	Men %	Women %	<35 %	35-54 %	55+ %
Gain weight	5	8	2	11	3	2
Maintain current weight	35	40	31	32	33	41
Lose weight	54	47	60	50	61	48
Don’t care about weight	6	5	7	8	4	8

These results are consistent with other findings that men’s perceptions of desirable body shape mean they are generally satisfied with their figures, whereas women’s perceptions place pressure on them to lose weight. They also help to explain why dieting is more common among women than among men and why concerns about body shape among young women can lead in extreme cases to the eating disorders anorexia and bulimia.

Conclusions

Sport and other leisure time activities play an important part in the lives of most New Zealanders and contribute to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of our society. Not surprisingly, most people would prefer to have more leisure time, but a lack of money restricts some people’s access to the leisure time activities they would like to do. Nevertheless, New Zealanders are involved in a wide range of active and passive leisure activities; the most frequent of the former are walking and playing word or number games, for the latter it is watching television.

Most New Zealanders describe themselves as happy and healthy, but these perceptions are influenced by marital status. The happiest and healthiest are married men and women; the least happy and healthy are divorced, widowed and separated men. Overall, about half of New Zealanders would like to lose weight but the proportions are higher for women, particularly middle-aged women. This emphasis on losing weight is reflected in different perceptions among women and men of the ‘ideal’ body shape for a woman, something which in the extreme may be related to the greater prevalence of eating disorders among women.

About the Authors

Members of the University Department of Marketing involved in this survey were: Professor Philip Gendall (Professor of Marketing) and Vivien Michaels (Research Assistant).

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Access to data from previous ISSP surveys conducted in New Zealand: Religion, 1991 and 1998; Social Inequality, 1992 and 1999; The Environment, 1993 and 2000; The Roles of Men and Women in Society, 1994 and 2002; National Identity, 1996 and 2003; The Role of Government and Work Orientation, 1997; Social Networks, 2001; Citizenship, 2004; Work Orientation, 2005; Role of Government, 2006, is available through the Department of Communication, Journalism & Marketing, Massey University.