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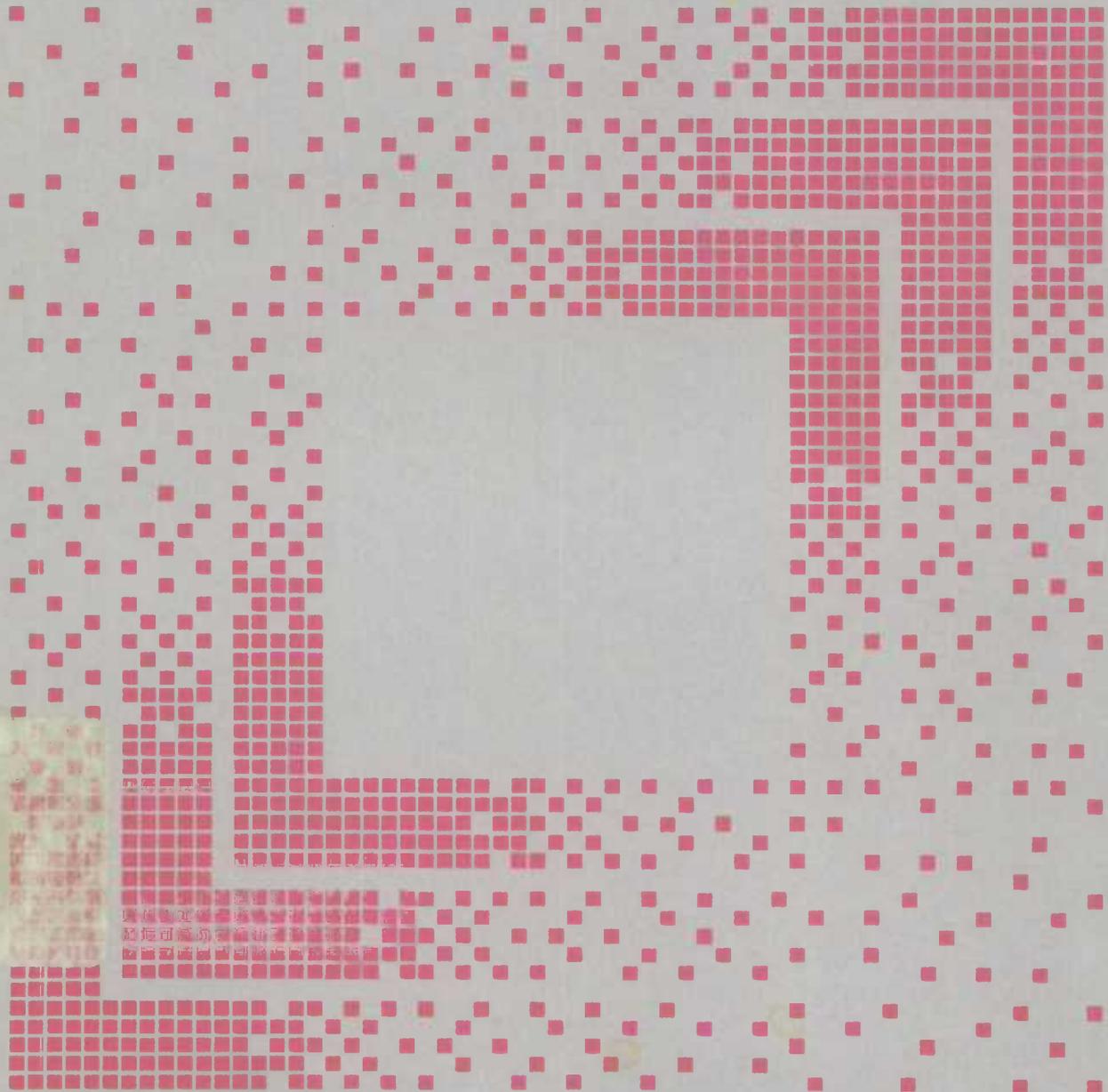
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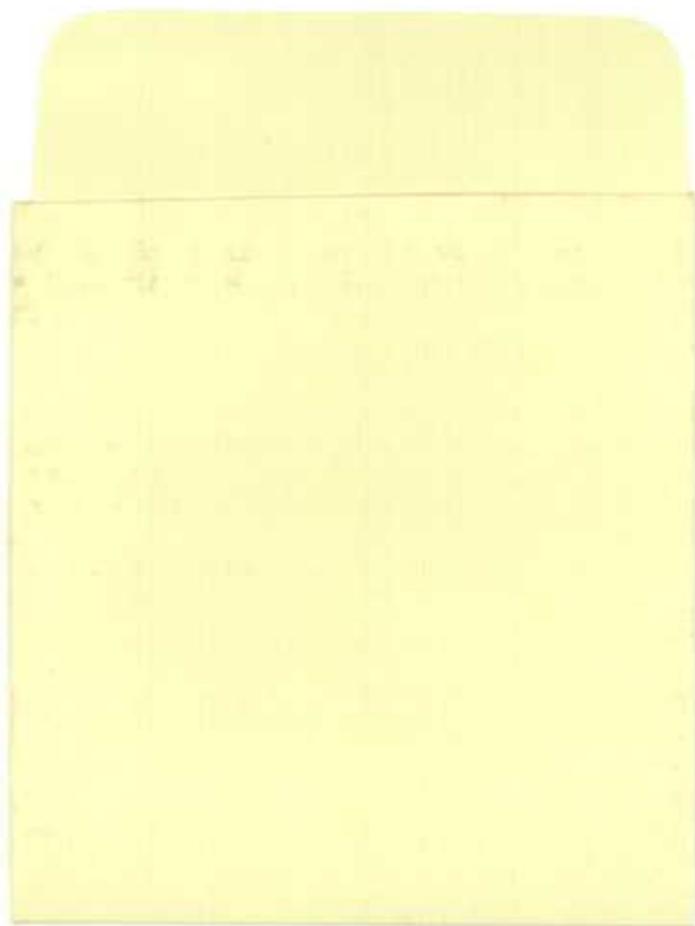
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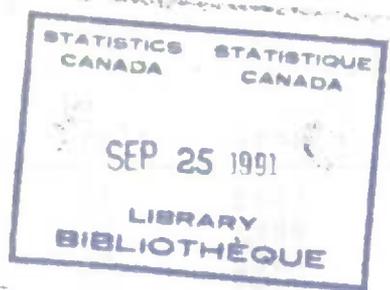
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GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM

FEATURES AND STATUS REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

For some time Statistics Canada has been aware of gaps in the national statistical information system with respect to data on socio-economic trends. These gaps cannot be filled through existing data sources or vehicles because of the level of detail required or the population to be covered. The demand for such data has brought about the introduction of general social surveys in other countries such as Australia, Japan, the Scandinavian nations, and the United Kingdom.

In Canada the General Social Survey (GSS) is gathering a wide variety of data to meet different kinds of unmet needs, many with differing audiences and relevant periodicities. GSS has two principal objectives: first, to gather data on social trends in order to monitor changes in Canadian society over time, and secondly, to provide information on specific policy issues of current or emerging interest. GSS is a continuing program with a single survey cycle each year.

2. FEATURES

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

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 or measures temporal changes in society related to living conditions or well-being. General topic areas for core content include health, education, social environment, and personal risk. All Core content areas cannot be treated adequately in each survey cycle. Instead, each cycle will cover a specific Core content area, which will recur on a periodic basis. Figure 1 shows the expected content by cycle until 1991.

Within a survey cycle, data related to both the status of the content area as well as barriers and bridges to improving status will be collected. For example Cycle One Core content included disability and health problems (health status measures) and smoking, alcohol use, and physical activity (barriers and bridges to improving health status).

Figure 1: GSS content coverage

Cycle	Year	Core content area	Focus issue
1	1985	Health	Social support
2	1986	Social environment #1	Language
3	1987	Personal risk	ND
4	1988	Education and work	ND
5	1989	Social environment #2	ND
6	1990	Health	ND
7	1991	Social environment #1	ND

Key: ND = Not yet decided.

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, youth unemployment. This does not imply that Core content is not also relevant to policy questions and social issues. However, in comparison with 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 longer 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 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; flexibility with respect to sample design and size changes; centralized data collection should allow better monitoring and control of costs and data quality. About three percent of households in the ten provinces do not have phones.

Nevertheless, phone interviewing does have drawbacks: non-coverage of households, while low, are concentrated in population groups with low education attainment or income; response rates tend to be lower than for face-to-face interviews; some limitations on the amount or type of data which can be collected. Phone interviewing is relatively new in Statistics Canada and it is expected that more operational experience will reduce the impact of these drawbacks. However, alternative collection methods may be more appropriate than phone interviewing for particular population groups and for particular types of data and thus GSS is not confined to a single collection methodology.

The sample size of each cycle of the GSS is expected to be approximately 10,000 households. Data will be tabulated primarily at the national level, with a potential to do some tabulations at a regional level.

2.3 OUTPUT

Because of the broad scope of data collected by GSS in a single cycle, not all topics can be fully explored in a single publication. The GSS team will produce an initial publication which will present summary data, primarily in the form of tables and charts, with some brief descriptive analysis. The purpose of this publication is to show the potential of the GSS database in a timely fashion. Further analysis will be done by subject matter divisions in Statistics Canada and by other interested groups on either a cooperative basis with Statistics Canada or independently by purchasing GSS data. In order to facilitate analysis, a public use micro-data file, together with supporting documentation, will be produced.

3. STATUS

This section summarizes progress to date for Cycles 1, 2 and 3, as well as expected activities over the next year.

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, covered 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 Cycle 1 main sample took place across the ten provinces in September and October 1985. Persons aged 15 to 64 years old were interviewed by phone, with persons 65 years and older interviewed face-to-face.

Preliminary data were disseminated in June 1986. Release of a public use micro-data file and related documentation is planned for December 1986. The first report on findings from Cycle 1 is scheduled for June 1987.

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 covered 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 until a later Cycle. Core content on

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is followed by a detailed account of the various projects and the results achieved. The report concludes with a summary of the work done and the plans for the future.

The second part of the report deals with the financial aspects of the work. It gives a detailed account of the income and expenditure for the year and shows how the work has been financed. It also discusses the various sources of income and the methods of expenditure.

The third part of the report deals with the personnel of the organization. It gives a detailed account of the staff and the work done by each of them. It also discusses the various methods of recruitment and the methods of training.

"social environment", intended for a later Cycle, was moved forward as a replacement. This new Core content covers the topics of inter- and intra- generational mobility, daily activities done on own and with others, and personal well-being. A consortium of clients are sponsoring language 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. The findings from this pilot, combined with the results of a review by specialists in the areas of mobility, time use and language, formed the basis on which pilot survey questionnaires and procedures were modified. Interviewing for the main Cycle 2 sample (10,000 households across 10 provinces) is being done, solely by telephone, in November and December 1986. An additional sample of approximately 8,000 households is being interviewed during the same period and using the same questionnaires, except for the exclusion of the section on daily activities. This additional sample is concentrated in areas of New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario where there are significant proportions of both official language groups.

Preliminary data from this cycle should be released in the summer of 1987, with a public use micro-data file expected to be available by the end of the year. The Cycle 2 findings report is scheduled for early 1988.

3.3 CYCLE 3

Core content for Cycle 3 is to be "Personal Risk". While development of this content for Cycle 3 has just started, it will be able to draw on work already done during Cycle 2, before this content area was replaced by that on social environment. There are many ways in which a person can be at increased risk. One can have a serious disease, be involved in a traffic accident or an accident at work or in the home, be assaulted or robbed, be in the path of a blizzard, tornado, fire or flood, or be exposed to technological catastrophes. The amount of data which GSS can collect in one survey cycle is limited, hence there is a need to restrict this personal risk coverage for Cycle 3. It is proposed to restrict Cycle 3 to risk involving accidents, crimes and the environment. This excludes unexpected bodily damage caused by malfunctions or diseases of the body, but includes those caused by some external event.

In addition, the status and barriers and bridges model has to be integrated with the content elements. While status data provide the means for monitoring personal risk over time, data on barriers and bridges are of particular relevance to government planners responsible for programmes to reduce level of personal risk. Such barriers and bridges data need to concentrate on factors which are amenable to change through intervention or outside influence. Hence, the framework for personal risk data is given in figure 2.

Figure 2: Personal risk data framework

Core Content element	Model category	
	Status	Barriers & bridges
Accidents		
Crime		
Environment		

For each of the three elements of personal risk, data related to status and barriers and bridges are to be covered. Although the specifics of this data have not yet been delineated, the broad dimensions can be indicated. The generally accepted approach for the collection of status data is to screen every respondent for all relevant risk events within a predetermined time period and then, for each event, collect specific data regarding time, location, type of event, who was involved and consequences. Data on barriers and bridges can be further divided into Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP). In Cycle 1, data on barriers and bridges concentrated on practices, such as amount of alcohol consumed and time spent on physical activities. For personal risk there is scope for a more balanced coverage of KAP. For example, crime related data might be obtained on: knowledge of crime prevention programmes; attitudes to crime prevention and law enforcement; practices related to individual safety and property security.

Each survey cycle has to achieve a balance between the range of data coverage and detail. As in the case of the health component of Cycle 1, where it was realised at an early date that it was not appropriate for GSS to collect the range and detail of data obtained by the Canada Health Survey, so Cycle 3 has to determine appropriate coverage for personal risk data and not simply attempt to repeat previous surveys.

A number of federal departments are interested in aspects of personal risk. These include: Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Health and Welfare, Environment, Department of Justice, Solicitor General and Transport. As for Cycles 1 and 2, there are expected to be many data users from outside government, particularly in universities and institutes. This is in keeping with the objectives of GSS where the data obtained, particularly those related to monitoring change over time, are of a longer term nature and require extensive analysis. At this early stage in the development of Cycle 3, there are no sponsors for Focus content.

Pilot survey data collection forms and related procedures need to be finalized in February 1987, with the pilot taking place in the field in April. The main Cycle 3 survey is scheduled to collect data in October 1987 with preliminary data released in the summer of 1988. A public use micro-data file should be available in the fall, with publication of the Cycle 3 report expected by early 1989.

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