

Socially perceived necessities in South Africa: patterns of possession

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**Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy
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1 Introduction

This paper presents findings on people's views about what is necessary for an acceptable standard of living in present-day South Africa and the extent to which those items are possessed. The approach taken here is based on a concept of relative poverty that focuses on the ability of people to achieve a socially determined acceptable standard of living to enable them to participate fully in society (Townsend, 1979; Pantazis *et al.*, 2006). Such an approach includes but also goes beyond the meeting of basic needs and resonates well with principles contained in key South African policy documents and the Constitution (Magasela, 2005).

The research is based on the 'socially perceived necessities' survey tradition that originated in Britain (e.g. Bradshaw *et al.*, 1998; Gordon and Pantazis, 1997; Gordon *et al.*, 2000; Mack and Lansley, 1985; Pantazis *et al.*, 2006). This approach has been applied subsequently in several other countries around the world though not, until this study, in a society that has such high levels of inequality as South Africa (Leibbrandt *et al.*, 2010).

Wright (2008 and 2011) has demonstrated that in spite of the many differences that exist between different social, racial and economic groups in South Africa - a surprisingly common view exists about what is required in order to be able to have an acceptable standard of living. The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which the socially perceived necessities are possessed.

2 Methodology

The analysis was undertaken using data from a socially perceived necessities module in the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) 2006 South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS). The module formed part of a project that was undertaken by the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy at the University of Oxford. Initially, a series of focus groups were undertaken across South Africa, to explore what possessions, services and activities people regarded as essential that each and every person in South Africa should have, have access to, or be able to do, in order to have an acceptable standard of living (Noble *et al.*, 2004 and 2005). Findings from the focus groups have been reported in relation to education (Barnes and Wright, 2007), children (Barnes *et al.*, 2007), housing (Magasela *et al.*, 2006), and health (Cluver *et al.*, 2007). Following on from these focus groups, a pilot module was included in the 2005 SASAS to obtain a nationally representative definition of necessities (Noble *et al.*, 2007; Wright *et al.*, 2010). Finally, a module was included in the 2006 SASAS which again included the definitional questions but additionally included measurement questions to ascertain who had and did not have the 'socially perceived necessities'.

In order to construct a direct definition of relative poverty that falls within the parameters of an acceptable standard of living, the definition process can be broken down into five stages. First, a list of possible necessities for an acceptable standard of living is developed; second, the list of possible necessities is incorporated into a survey to explore which items are defined as necessary by a representative sample of the society; third, certain items are identified as 'socially perceived necessities' based on selected criteria; fourth, a poverty threshold is determined (e.g. how many socially

perceived necessities need to be lacking in order to be classified as ‘poor’); and finally a decision is then made about whether (and if so, how) to cost out an income level below which people are likely to be deprived based on this definition.

Wright (2011) explored differences in responses to the definitional questions about the 50 possible necessities that were included in SASAS 2006. A range of characteristics were considered including age, sex, population group, location, and several definitions of poverty and proxies for class, which served to inform stage three. This paper informs the fourth stage of the definitional process by considering the extent to which people possess the socially perceived necessities.

The socially perceived necessities module was contained within Questionnaire 1 of SASAS 2006 (2,904 cases). The translation of the module¹, training of the interviewers, the actual interviews, and the inputting, cleaning and weighting of the data were all undertaken by the HSRC, as part of the annual running of the survey (Pillay *et al.*, 2006; Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Questionnaire 2 of SASAS 2006 contained a set of common questions (but not the socially perceived necessities module) and some additional separate modules that were not included in Questionnaire 1. Analysis in this paper is undertaken using Questionnaire 1 which is nationally representative.²

In order for the analysis to be undertaken, an item-level dataset (rather than a person-level dataset) was created. This rectangular dataset contained a row for each of the 50 items that were asked about in the definitional (and measurement) modules in SASAS 2006 (see **Annex 1**). Alongside each item, the columns contain the responses of different subgroups in relation to that item, e.g. percentage of black African respondents possessing each item, percentage of black African respondents not possessing each item, and so on. All the figures in this new dataset were calculated using population weights.

Before proceeding, **Table 1** shows the percentage of the total population that defined each of the 50 items as ‘essential for everyone to have in order to enjoy an acceptable standard of living in South Africa today’.³ This table serves as the benchmark against which the patterns of possession of the various items can be compared.

Table 1 Percentage of people defining an item as ‘essential’ (sorted in descending order)

Item	% of All saying essential
* Mains electricity in the house	92
* Someone to look after you if you are very ill	91
* A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	90

¹ The SASAS 2006 questionnaire was made available in seven languages (Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Setswana, Tshivenda and Xitsonga).

² Questionnaire 2 is used for the purposes of imputing missing and implausible zero incomes in SASAS 2006, for which Questionnaires 1 and 2 were combined – this is explained below.

³ All responses are population weighted (to represent the total population in South Africa aged 16 and over in 2006) unless otherwise specified, and all percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

* Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	89
* A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area?	87
* A fridge	86
* Street lighting	85
* Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	82
* Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82
* Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	81
* Having police on the streets in the local area	80
* Tared roads close to the house	80
* Paid employment for people of working age	79
* For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	79
* A flush toilet in the house	78
* People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	77
* Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	76
* A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the streets	75
* A large supermarket in the local area	75
A radio	74
* Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	74
* A fence or wall around the property	74
* Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	73
* Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	72
* Regular savings for emergencies	71
* A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	69
Television/ TV	69
Someone to lend you money in an emergency	66
A cell phone	63
* Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	62
A bath or shower in the house	62
Burglar bars in the house	62
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	56
Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	55
A sofa/lounge suite	54
A garden	51
A car	49
A landline phone	48
Washing machine	44
A lock-up garage for vehicles	43
A small amount of money to spend on yourself not on your family each week	42
Having enough money to give presents on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, funerals	41
For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with	39
A burglar alarm system for the house	38
A holiday away from home for one week a year, not visiting relatives	37
A family take-away or bring-home meal once a month	34
An armed response service for the house	28
A DVD player	27
A computer in the home	26
Satellite Television/DSTV	19

Source: SASAS 2006

Notes: The 36 items that were defined as 'essential' by more than half of the respondents are highlighted in bold. The 26 asterisked items are explained below in the conclusion section.

As well as including the set of definitional questions, the SASAS 2006 module contained a matching set of measurement questions, to find out whether people possessed the items or not. In this paper the responses to these measurement questions are analysed to explore whether people possess the socially perceived necessities or not, how this varies by some of the subgroups considered in Wright (2011), and how the lack of socially perceived necessities might be interpreted.

In Section 3.1, the possession rates are considered at aggregate level for the total population, and comparisons are made between the possession rates of the socially perceived necessities by sex, population group and income (above and below R847 per capita per calendar month). In the final part of this section, the possession rates are tested for their robustness by comparing the results with responses to other questions in SASAS 2006, as well as comparable questions in the South African 2007 Community Survey.

In Section 3.2 the reasons given by respondents for non-possession are explored at an aggregate level, with a particular focus on whether it is possible to identify an 'enforced' lack of an item (i.e. situations when the respondent does not have the item, wants to have it but lacks the resources to obtain it). This distinction is relevant for operationalising the democratic definition in terms of the extent to which an 'enforced lack' enhances a more crude measure of general lack of an item. This section also explores the extent to which there is evidence of people *choosing* not to possess socially perceived necessities.

Section 3.3 then explores the notion of individually perceived necessities (i.e. items which a particular individual regards as being essential) and how these relate to socially perceived necessities (i.e. the items defined as essential by the majority of the population overall). Analysis is undertaken to identify whether people are more likely to possess an item if they define it as essential, thereby starting to explore whether there is an association between individuals' preferences and patterns of possession – a theme which is explored in greater detail elsewhere. This section concludes by reporting on the discrepancies by population group and income status in terms of the average number of socially perceived (and individually perceived) necessities that people possess.

3.1 Aggregate patterns of possession

3.1.1 Possession of the socially perceived necessities

As seen in Wright (2011), 36 items were defined as ‘essential’ by 50% or more of the population (the ‘socially perceived necessities’). To what extent does this fact relate to aggregate level patterns of possession of these 36 items? Are people’s definitions of necessities reflecting average patterns of possession in South Africa, or do the 36 ‘essential’ items reflect quite a different reality that is more aspirational?

Following on from the definitional questions in SASAS 2006, people were asked: ‘Please say whether you have each of the following. If you do not have the item please say whether you don’t have it and don’t want it, or don’t have it and can’t afford it. So the three possible answers are ‘HAVE’, ‘DON’T HAVE AND DON’T WANT’ or ‘DON’T HAVE AND CAN’T AFFORD’’. There was also an option for people to say ‘DO NOT KNOW’. For activities, the possible answers were ‘DO’, ‘DON’T DO AND DON’T WANT TO DO’ or ‘DON’T DO AND CAN’T AFFORD’. For the items relating to the neighbourhood, and relationships with friends and family, the possible options were ‘HAVE’ or ‘DON’T HAVE’ as these items do not necessarily relate to access to financial resources (see **Annex 1**).

Only three respondents claimed to have all 50 of the items that were asked about (which is 0.1% of all respondents, using the survey weights), and 38 respondents (or 1.1% of all respondents, using the survey weights) claimed to have all 36 socially perceived necessities.⁴ The mean number of socially perceived necessities possessed by all respondents is 21.5.

The ten items that are possessed by the highest percentage of the population (from the list of 50 possible items) are shown in the table below - all ten items are socially perceived necessities. It is noteworthy that for six of the ten items a lower percentage of the population possessed the items than defined them as essential, presenting a first indication that there is a mismatch between people’s views about necessities and actual patterns of possession. For example, while 90% of respondents said that a weatherproof house was essential, this was only possessed by three-quarters of the respondents.

⁴ Most of these 38 cases seem plausible, as 73% of those in possession of all 36 socially perceived necessities were employed in a non-elementary job, and 74% lived in households with a per capita income of more than R847 per month (for details about this income threshold see Wright, 2011).

Table 2 The ten items that were possessed by the highest percentage of the population

Item	% of the population that possess the item	NB % of the population saying 'essential'
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	87	91
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	86	76
A radio	84	74
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area	83	87
Mains electricity in the house	82	92
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	81	89
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather	75	90
Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	75	73
Television/ TV	72	69
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	72	82

Source: SASAS 2006

Conversely, the items in the module with the lowest aggregate possession rates are 'an armed response service for the house' (11%), 'a burglar alarm system for the house' (12%), a satellite television (13%) and a computer in the home (18%), none of which are socially perceived necessities.

Twenty-eight of the 36 socially perceived necessities were possessed by the majority of the population, i.e. by 50% or more of respondents. Conversely, 8 of the 36 socially perceived necessities were not possessed by the majority of the population. These items are 'having police on the streets in the local area' (80% defined this as 'essential' but only 45% reported that this was the case in their area); 'people who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor' (77% defined this as 'essential' but only 48% could do so); 'somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house' (72% defined this as 'essential' but only 39% reported that they had this⁵); regular savings for emergencies (71% defined this as 'essential' but only 42% had it); meat/fish/vegetarian equivalent every day (62% defined this as 'essential' but only 49% had it); 'a bath or shower in the house' (62% defined this as 'essential' but only 42% had it); and burglar bars in the house (62% defined this as 'essential' but only 40% had it). These are particularly interesting items, as they are all socially perceived necessities that are largely lacked. The reasons for lacking them are not solely due to lack of resources: the police presence and access to safe play space are neighbourhood qualities that cannot be purchased (unless one chooses – and can afford - to move to a place with better provision). A bath or shower in the house may partly relate to provision of piped water in the neighbourhood. The other four items all relate to access to resources: i.e. resources to afford medication, to save regularly, to eat protein every day, and to protect the house from intruders.⁶

⁵ This raises the question of whether any children are present in the household – this is considered later in this paper.

⁶ The eighth item was 'paid employment for people of working age' where 79% of all respondents defined it as essential, and only 33% of working age adults were in paid employment (discussed in more detail below).

This feeds into the debate about whether a socially perceived necessity has to be possessed by the majority of the population in order for it to be regarded as an ‘essential’ – the literature is divided on this issue, depending on whether the researcher has selected ‘needs’ or ‘norms’ as the parameters for their concept of poverty. For example, Halleröd *et al.* argue that:

‘enforced lack of socially perceived necessities must be concentrated on a relatively small part of the population before there can be talk of poverty.’ (Halleröd *et al.*, 1997: 216).

In contrast, Mack and Lansley observe that whilst in the UK at least two-thirds of the population possessed each of the socially perceived necessities, this does not need to be the case. They add the following comment which has a direct bearing on the South African context:

‘In an affluent society like Britain, this is to be expected but it is not implicit in the approach. It is possible to imagine a society in which the majority of people do not have access to a standard of living that is generally judged to be a minimum. Indeed, many ‘Third World’ countries may fall into this category. Arguably, this ability to cope theoretically with very differing degrees of poverty is an advantage of this methodology over one that defines poverty with reference to the norm.’ (Mack and Lansley, 1985: 67)⁷

Veit-Wilson also highlights this advantage of the approach and argues that:

‘Thus one can conceive of a society which defines as necessities things which the majority do not have, and of a society with a considerable degree of inequality but in which nobody lacks socially defined necessities and in which there was therefore no poverty.’ (Veit-Wilson, 1987: 201).

South African society can be regarded as an example of Veit-Wilson’s first type of society as several of the necessities are not possessed by the majority.

Overall, 40 of the 50 items in the module were possessed by a smaller percentage of people than defined them as ‘essential’, i.e. for 80% of the items in the module, fewer people possessed them than regarded them as ‘essential’, on average. Looking just at the socially perceived necessities, 28 of the 36 items were possessed by a smaller percentage of people than defined each one as essential, i.e. for 78% of the socially perceived necessities, fewer people possessed them than regarded them as ‘essential’ on average.⁸ This demonstrates a considerable discrepancy between the standard of living which people regard as acceptable and the standard of living that is currently experienced by many people in South Africa.

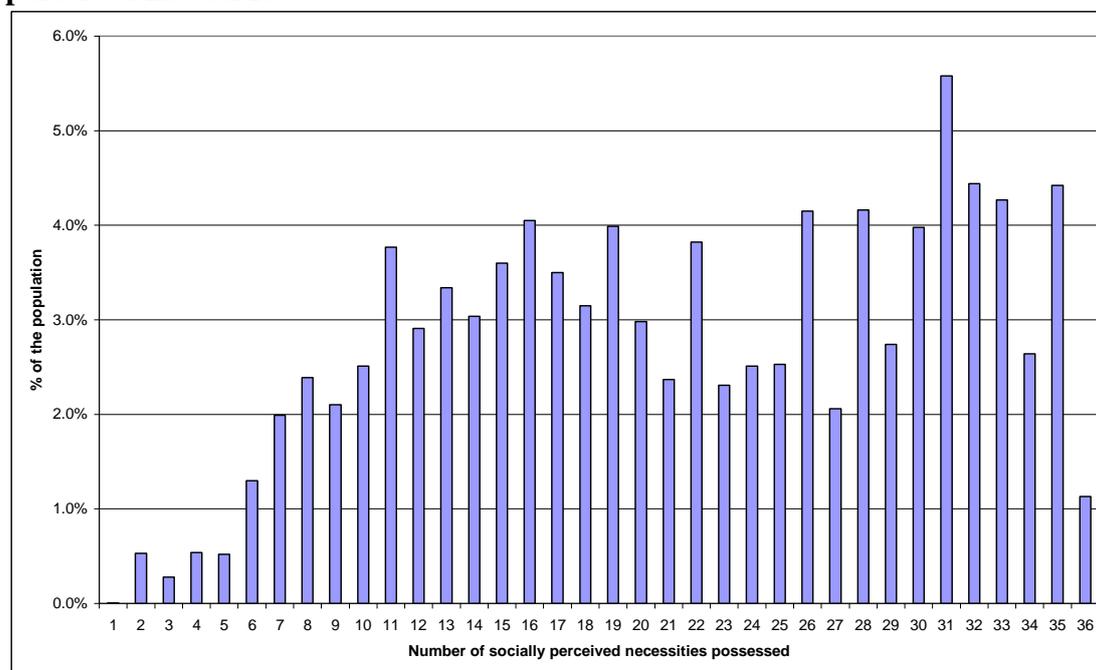
The distribution of possession of the 36 socially perceived necessities is shown in **Figure 1** below. There appears to be a bimodal distribution, with peaks occurring around the possession of 16 and 31 items. This seems to indicate the presence of two

⁷ This same point is later made by Van den Bosch (2001: 55).

⁸ The eight socially perceived necessities that are possessed by a higher percentage of people than define them as essential are: a garden, special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival, being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions, television, cell phone, sofa/lounge suite, a radio, and someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed. These are items which, though possessed, are not regarded by the respondents (to the same extent) as being essential for the population at large to possess – this issue is discussed further in Section 5.4.

‘tiers’ in South African society, with one group having roughly double the number of socially perceived necessities than the other group. This distribution echoes the reference made in the ANC’s RDP Policy Framework to South African society as a ‘first world’ and a ‘third world’ (ANC, 1994: par 1.3.5).

Figure 1 Percentage of respondents in possession of the 36 socially perceived necessities



Source: SASAS 2006

Patterns of possession are analysed using a range of different characteristics later in this paper, but before moving forward a brief summary of the profile of people in different parts of this distribution is presented, as the picture that has emerged in **Figure 1** is very striking. If an approximate cut-off point is selected at the dip in the distribution and a comparison is made between people possessing 1-24 socially perceived necessities and those possessing 25 or more, the following profiles emerge (see **Table 3** below).

Table 3 Proportion of the total population and a selection of subgroups that fall into the ‘two tiers’ seen in Figure 1

	% possessing 1-24 socially perceived necessities	% possessing 25 or more socially perceived necessities
Total population	58	42
Female	58	42
Male	57	42
Black African	70	30
Coloured	33	67
Indian/Asian	4	96
White	7	92
Above R847 pcm	26	74
Below R847 pcm	69	31

Source: SASAS 2006

This table reflects the polarised nature of South African society, which becomes increasingly evident throughout this paper. Though the possession rates do not differ particularly by sex, they vary a great deal by population group and income. So for example, whilst 70% of black African people fall into the group of those possessing 1-24 socially perceived necessities, 96% of Indian/Asian people, 92% of white people, and two-thirds of coloured people fall into the group of those possessing 25 or more socially perceived necessities. This is discussed further in the next section.

3.1.2 Possession of the socially perceived necessities by sex, population group and income

This section explores in greater detail the extent to which possession rates vary by sex, population group and income for the socially perceived necessities.

The differences between men and women in terms of patterns of possession of the socially perceived necessities were mainly very small. **Table 4** below shows the nine socially perceived necessities for which the possession rates differed by sex by five percentage points or more. As can be seen, women were more likely to report that they had an adult at home when children under ten were at home, that they could afford school uniforms for children without hardship, that they had a television and that they had a special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival. Men in contrast were more likely to report that they had police on the streets in the local area, tarred roads close to the house, safe play areas for children, and that they were employed.

Table 4 Socially perceived necessities: possession rates for the total population and by sex – where possession rates vary by at least five percentage points by sex

Item	% of men that possess the item	% of women that possess the item	NB % of all that possess the item	NB % of all that said essential
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home (see note)	60*	74*	67	81
Having police on the streets in the local area	48	41	45	80
Tarred roads close to the house	55	49	52	80
Paid employment for people of working age (see note)	42*	24*	33	79
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship (see note)	53*	65*	60	79
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house (see note)	41	36	39	72
Regular savings for emergencies	46	39	42	71
Television/ TV	69	75	72	69
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	53*	61*	57	56

Source: SASAS 2006

Notes: All these possession rates were calculated as the percentage of women possessing the item divided by *all* women, and the percentage of men possessing the item divided by *all* men. This is contentious as not all of the respondents were of working age (and therefore the employment 'possession' rate is unconventional) and nor do they all have children in the household (and therefore the child-related possession rates are not necessarily meaningful). However it does enable us to make a quick comparison of possession rates by sex here as issues relating to employment and child-related

items are discussed in more detail below. Only four of the differences shown here are significant (*= $p<0.01$).

Some of these differences could possibly be explained by the probable different circumstances of men and women due to migratory working patterns and family structures. Though the results in this table could lead one to hypothesise that a higher percentage of male respondents than female respondents live in urban areas (due, for example, to the higher reported rates of ‘possession’ of tarred roads by men) this is only marginally the case.⁹ The differences by sex in terms of presence of a child in the house are, however, much more striking: 48% of the male respondents had at least one child under the age of 16 living in their household¹⁰, compared to 71% of women.¹¹ Men have relatively higher financial security, with 46% possessing regular savings for emergencies, compared to 39% for women, no doubt reflecting the different employment rates of the respondents by sex.

The breakdown of patterns of possession by population group is much more striking. Apart from three items, where coloured people have the lowest possession rate¹², black African respondents have the lowest possession rate across the population groups for each of the socially perceived necessities. For example, though almost all coloured, Indian/Asian and white respondents had mains electricity in the house and sufficient clothing to keep warm and dry, this was possessed by only three-quarters of black African respondents. **Table 5** shows the possession rates for each population group for the 36 socially perceived necessities.

The table also shows the possession rates by income status, based on a per capita per month average household income threshold. As would be expected the possession rates vary greatly by income status and in some instances the differences between the two income groups are very stark. For example, whilst 94% of those above this income threshold live in weather proof houses, this is only enjoyed by 68% of those below the threshold; and while 73% of those above the threshold can afford medicines prescribed by their doctor, this can only be afforded by 39% of people below the threshold. Apart from an anomalous couple of child-related items (that probably reflect the fact that higher income people have fewer children in the household on average)¹³, all items have a higher possession rate for those who fall above the income threshold than those below it.

⁹ In fact, the urban/rural difference by sex is quite small, with 36% of male respondents living in rural areas compared with 39% of female respondents.

¹⁰ The fact that 53% of men said that they had been able to buy school uniforms for children without hardship whereas only 48% of men had children under 16 in their households is not problematic: the school uniforms could have been purchased a long time ago, or their children could live in other households.

¹¹ This finding means that analysis relating to child-related items should really only be undertaken for households that contain children. Therefore, and as will be explained again at the time, most of the subsequent analysis after this section excludes the child-related items, particularly in relation to the analysis relating to enforced lack.

¹² The three exceptions where coloured respondents have a lower possession rate than black African respondents are: ‘For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship’, regular savings for emergencies, and a cell phone.

¹³ This is indeed the case: 40% of those reporting an average per capita household income greater than R847 per month had children (aged less than 16) in the household, compared with 67% of people with per capita household incomes less than R847 per month.

This section concludes by comparing the possession rates with other similar questions contained within SASAS 2006 and with a separate nationally representative survey, before moving to look at the concomitant issue of non-possession of items in Section 3.3.

Table 5 Socially perceived necessities: possession rates by population group, income status and for the total population

Item	% that possess the item – Black African	% that possess the item - Coloured	% that possess the item – Indian/ Asian	% that possess the item - White	% that possess the item – those with per capita incomes of less than R847 pcm	% that possess the item – those with per capita incomes of more than R847 pcm	NB % of All that possess the item
Mains electricity in the house	77	96	100	100	77	96	82
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	85	90	94	97	87	87	87
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	68	95	100	99	68	94	75
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	76	95	97	99	77	92	81
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area?	79	90	95	96	80	88	83
A fridge	62	83	100	100	64	85	70
Street lighting	38	83	96	97	41	78	51
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	62	69	71	76	59	78	64
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	67	82	98	95	69	79	72
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	66	67	89	70	67	67	67
Having police on the streets in the local area	39	64	52	66	39	60	45
Tarred roads close to the house	41	70	98	98	40	83	52
Paid employment for people of working age	30	40	38	46	25	54	33
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	62	52	68	48	62	53	60
A flush toilet in the house	38	89	100	100	40	82	51
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	38	59	95	94	39	73	48
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	84	88	98	98	84	92	86
A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the streets	46	70	90	87	48	70	54
A large supermarket in the local area	43	64	77	88	44	71	51
A radio	82	84	96	95	81	92	84
Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	51	76	94	94	501	84	59

A fence or wall around the property	58	80	84	94	58	83	65
Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	70	83	97	93	69	89	75
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	31	55	53	73	31	59	39
Regular savings for emergencies	37	35	72	76	32	71	42
Television/ TV ¹⁴	66	87	98	97	68	85	72
A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	43	67	87	83	45	68	51
Someone to lend you money in an emergency	52	58	86	86	50	79	58
A cell phone	66	58	85	96	64	84	69
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	37	73	96	91	39	75	49
A bath or shower in the house	27	78	100	100	31	74	42
Burglar bars in the house	30	42	98	91	31	66	40
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	48	79	93	90	50	76	57
Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	46	59	84	93	46	74	53
A sofa/lounge suite	55	85	95	98	58	78	64
A garden	43	63	86	90	44	72	52

Source: SASAS 2006

Notes: Sorted in descending order of percentage of the total population that defined the item as essential (i.e. the same order as Table 3.1)

The differences by income status are all significant ($p < 0.001$) apart from 'someone to look after you if you are very ill', 'a place of worship in the local area', and 'having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home'. The differences by population group are all significant ($p < 0.01$) apart from 'ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society' and 'having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home'. The same caveats apply that are stated in Table 5.3 (i.e. the 'possession rates' for employment and child-related items should be treated with caution as not all people are of working age, and not all respondents live with children under the age of 16).

¹⁴ The fact that 97% of white respondents possessed a television is noteworthy in the context of the small proportion of white respondents who defined this item as essential (52%). The discrepancy for Indian/Asian respondents is even greater, as 47% of Indian/Asian respondents defined a television as essential and yet 98% possessed one. This echoes the findings from Breadline Britain in the UK, though it was presented in the UK context as a class issue: 'To the middle classes, the television, though it firmly occupies a corner of all their homes, is often regarded with disdain. Such attitudes are of importance because they go hand in hand with a view among the better-off that the poor are poor because of fecklessness.' (Mack and Lansley, 1985: 64).

3.1.3 Comparison of possession rates with other data sources

In order to explore the reliability of the possession rates (percentage of respondents saying that they possess an item), the figures can be compared in three different ways, though none are fully comprehensive. First, a small number of items are asked about in a similar way elsewhere within the SASAS 2006 survey, which means that the possession rates in the socially perceived necessities module can be compared at an aggregate level; second, because the survey is at an individual level it is possible to identify whether the same people say that they possess the item in a consistent way across the survey in these instances; and third, the possession rates for items are compared which also exist in the 2007 Community Survey.

Table 6 compares the aggregate-level possession rates of items in the socially perceived necessities module that were asked about in a similar way elsewhere within the same survey.

Table 6 SASAS 2006 IPSE items that can be compared with items elsewhere in the survey: aggregate level comparisons

SASAS 2006 socially perceived necessities item	% of all that have the item	SASAS 2006 question from elsewhere in the survey	SASAS 2006 question from elsewhere in the survey (% saying 'yes')
Q160 A fridge	70	Q306 does your household have a fridge/freezer combination (in working order)?	66
Q163 A landline phone	24	Q314 does your household have a telkom home telephone (in working order)?	24
Q165 Washing machine	32	Q310 does your household have a washing machine (in working order)?	31
Q168 Satellite Television/DSTV	13	Q319 does your household have m-net and or dstv (in working order)?	12
Q173 A cell phone	69	Q304 do you personally have a cell phone for personal or business use?	64
		Q325 does your household have one or more cell phones in the household (in working order)?	76
		Q326 does your household have only one cell phone in the household (in working order)?	25
Q174 Television	72	Q312 does your household have a television (in working order)?	73
Q175 A car	30	Q323 does your household have one or more motor vehicles (in working order)?	30
Q178) A computer in the home	18	Q302a do you have access to a computer at home?	17
Q180 A DVD player	39	Q322 does your household have a DVD player (in working order)?	39
Q184 Mains electricity in the house	82	Q301 does this household have a connection to the mains electricity supply?	84

Q185 A flush toilet in the house	51	q298 what type of toilet facility is available for this household? This question was linked to Q299 ('where is this toilet facility located?') to select people with a flush toilet in the dwelling connected to a municipal sewage system or to a septic tank.	41.9% in dwelling plus 12.5% in yard = 54%
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Source: SASAS 2006

The internal consistency within SASAS 2006 in relation to the 11 items shown in the table above is very striking at an aggregate level. The small differences that do exist can in most cases be explained by the different wording of the questions and in particular by the way in which the items asked about later in the questionnaire had to be in working order. The difference in responses regarding possession of the cell phone could be explained by most people interpreting 'having a cell phone' to mean that they personally possess one, but some interpreting it to mean that they can access one within the household, resulting in a possession rate that sits between the possession rates for Q304 and Q325 (individual and household cell phone possession rates respectively). The question about the flush toilet is not too disconcerting as the questions – and possible answers - were so differently worded.

For the items listed above it is possible to identify whether the same people were responding positively to the possession questions in the socially perceived necessities module and the possession questions located later on in the survey, at an individual level. Of those who said they had the item in the socially perceived necessities module, the following percentage said they had the same item at a later stage in the same survey (note the different wording of the questions, shown in the table above, and the fact that the items that came later in the questionnaire often had to be in working order): fridge 92%, landline phone 94%, washing machine 93%, satellite television 86%, cell phone 89% (based on q304) or 97% (based on q325), television 97%, car 95%, computer 84%, DVD player 93%, mains electricity 99%, and a flush toilet in the home 80%.¹⁵ Though not a perfect match (and this should not be expected for the reasons given above) these figures do suggest that people are largely responding consistently throughout the survey to similar questions.

The one item that was not included in the measurement component of the socially perceived necessities module was 'paid employment for people of working age' as this was asked directly in Q283 in SASAS 2006: 'what is your current employment status?'. Based on Q283, 33% of respondents of working age (women aged 16-59 inclusive, and men aged 16-64 inclusive) were in paid employment (full or part-time, including self-employed).¹⁶

¹⁵ All comparisons in this paragraph are significant $p < 0.001$.

¹⁶ For SASAS 2006 people aged 16 and over were interviewed, and the retirement ages in South Africa are 60 for women and 65 for men. The figure of 33% was reached by dividing all women aged 16-59 inclusive plus all men aged 16-64 inclusive who were in paid employment by the total number of women and men in the respective age bands. In the 2006 Labour Force Survey, Statistics South Africa counts the population of working age as 'All persons living in South Africa aged 15-65 inclusive at the time of the survey' and so does not take into account retirement ages. Based on Statistics South Africa's official definition of unemployment ('Persons aged 15-65 who did not have a job or business in the seven days prior to the survey interview but had looked for work or taken steps to start a business in the four weeks prior to the interview and were available to take up work within two weeks of the interview'), the 'labour absorption rate' (i.e. the percentage of the population of working age who were

For other items, such as a weatherproof house, it is not possible to make a direct (or close to direct) comparison between questions in the socially perceived necessities module and questions elsewhere in the same survey. However, some questions elsewhere in the survey can be explored to assess the meaningfulness of the socially perceived necessities module possession rates. For example, of those who said that they did not have a weatherproof house because they could not afford it (24% of all respondents) they responded in a logical way when asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the way that the government is handling affordable housing in the area: only 8% were satisfied or very satisfied, whereas 86% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Similarly, of those who did not have mains electricity in the house (17% of all respondents), 85% said that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how government is handling the provision of electricity in their neighbourhood, which makes logical sense.

It is also possible to compare the possession rates in SASAS 2006 to possession rates derived from the 2007 Community Survey which is a large-scale, nationally representative survey that was undertaken by Statistics South Africa in February 2007 (Statistics South Africa, 2007b). The Community Survey yielded completed responses for 238,067 dwelling units – a response rate of 94%. **Table 7** compares the possession rates in the socially perceived necessities module in SASAS 2006 with comparable questions that were included in the 2007 Community Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2007b).

Table 7 SASAS 2006 items that can be compared with the 2007 Community Survey: aggregate level comparisons

SASAS 2006 item	% of all that have the item	2007 Community Survey question	2007 Community Survey % of h/h saying 'yes'
Q185 A flush toilet in the house	51	H-06 What is the MAIN type of TOILET facility available for use by this household? 1=flush toilet connected to sewerage system, 2=flush toilet with septic tank	58
Q184 mains electricity in the house	82	H-09 What type of energy/fuel does this household MAINLY use for lighting? 1= electricity	80
Q182 A radio	84	H-10 Does the household have a radio?	77
Q174 A television	72	H-10 Does the household have a television?	66
Q178 A computer in the home	18	H-10 Does the household have a computer?	16
Q160 A fridge	70	H-10 Does the household have a refrigerator?	64
Q163 A landline phone	24	H-10 Does the household have a landline telephone?	19 ¹⁷
Q173 A cell phone	69	H-10 Does the household have a cellphone?	73

employed) was 42% (Statistics South Africa, 2007d: ii). If the analysis of the SASAS employment status question is adjusted to incorporate all those aged 16-65 inclusive, the 'possession' figure or 'labour absorption rate' remains 33%. The discrepancy can probably be explained by the fact that the SASAS 2006 derived employment rate includes all people of working age, whereas the Stats SA figure only contains economically active people in the denominator (and therefore excludes discouraged workers).

¹⁷ This is much lower than was found in the 2001 Census (24%). The fall in possession rate between 2001 and 2007 is attributed to the rise in popularity of the cellphone by Statistics South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2007b: 54).

Source: SASAS 2006 and the 2007 Community Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2007b).

There is a reassuring level of agreement between the possession rates obtained by SASAS 2006 and the entirely separate 2007 Community Survey. Though the Community Survey questionnaire does not mention that the items have to be in working order, the statistical reports do refer to the items as being in working order (e.g. Statistics South Africa, 2007b: 54) and this may account for the slightly lower possession rates obtained in the Community Survey, if the fieldworkers had been asked to specify that the items needed to be of working order (even though not specified in the questionnaire itself). The two exceptions are the flush toilet and the cell phone, where the possession rates are slightly higher in the Community Survey than in SASAS 2006. Cell phone possession is however rising quickly - it was only 32% in 2001 (Statistics South Africa, 2007b: 54). And the flush toilet discrepancy could be due to the fact that the 2007 Community Survey did not specify that the toilet had to be within the dwelling, whereas this was specified in SASAS 2006.

3.2 Reasons for non-possession of items

One of the reasons why Townsend's work (1979) was criticised by Piachaud was because Townsend did not explore the reason why people lacked items, and therefore he was not able to distinguish between constraint and choice, i.e. between enforced lack and other forms of lack such as choosing not to possess the item (Piachaud 1981; 1987). Subsequent studies have therefore made this distinction, in an attempt to elucidate the reasons for non-possession (e.g. Mack and Lansley, 1985). However, as will be demonstrated below, 'the long-running question of 'choice' is methodologically problematic' (Levitas, 2006: 155) and the issue still has not been satisfactorily resolved.

As explained in the section above, when respondents to the module in SASAS 2006 were asked about possession of items that could in principle be purchased or activities which usually cost money to undertake, people were given two possible responses to choose from if they did not possess the item. The possible responses were 'don't have, don't want' or 'don't have, can't afford' for the items, and 'don't do and don't want to do' or 'don't do and can't afford' for the activities. The reason for this distinction was to enable people to be identified who were experiencing an *enforced* lack of items or activities due to lack of resources.

In relation to the module in SASAS 2006 it could be argued that lack of some of the other remaining items, particularly the neighbourhood-related items, could also be seen as 'enforced'. Though the enforced lack may not be due to lack of personal resources per se, it could be enforced due to lack of provision by government (e.g. not employing sufficient police to achieve a presence on the street) or business (e.g. no large supermarket in the area) or organisation. However, lack of the five relationship items probably cannot be regarded as enforced – there will be numerous complicated reasons why people lack these items - and the lack of these items cannot necessarily be demonstrated to be enforced. These items are therefore excluded from the analysis in this section. It is also impossible to deduce whether people's state of unemployment is enforced (though this is likely to be mainly the case) and so this

item has also been excluded. All items relating to children are also excluded in this section, as these apply only to households with children (toys, school uniform and separate bedrooms for adults and children, somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house, and having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home).¹⁸ The question of enforced lack is therefore considered for 33 of the 50 items, plus the seven remaining neighbourhood items the lack of which could be interpreted as being enforced.¹⁹ Twenty-seven of these 40 items are socially perceived necessities.

Regarding the ‘purchasable’ items, there are at least four different options that could explain non-possession of purchasable items in terms of wanting the item and being able to afford it. These four categories are as follows:

Option 1: ‘don’t have, don’t want and can’t afford’. This relates to people who do not possess the item, do not want to have it and anyway do not have the resources to obtain it. This group is of interest to the extent that people may have adapted their preferences due to their lack of resources and stated that they do not want the item when in fact they would obtain the item if they had the resources or their circumstances changed, e.g. someone does not want a fridge because they do not have mains electricity and so would not be able to use it.

Option 2: ‘don’t have, don’t want but can afford’. This category captures people who could afford the item but do not have it and do not want to have it. These people possess the resources to choose whether to have an item or not and have opted not to do so for whatever reason.

Option 3: ‘don’t have, do want but can’t afford’. This is the classic category relating to an enforced lack of an item. People would like to have the item but do not have it and cannot afford it.

Option 4: ‘don’t have, do want and can afford’. This captures people who do not have the item, could afford it and do want it. They are either about to obtain the item or have chosen to spend their money in some other way. This category resonates with the practice of ‘substitution possibilities’ (Goedhart *et al.*, 1977: 516), where people at different stages in their life circumstances prioritise certain items over others (e.g. relatively wealthy families with young children may cut down on foreign holidays in favour of funding school trips, toys for the children, and/or a mortgage for a larger house). Though in principle such people could afford to purchase the item they have either chosen to spend the money on something else of greater current importance, or have decided to save. This scenario applies even more to people living in poverty who, on a daily basis, have to make trade-offs in the context of insufficient resources.

¹⁸ The exclusion of the child-related items does not prejudice the analysis, as it has been calculated that the responses to the 50 questions in the definitional module correlate 0.97 for those with and without children under 16 in the household (and therefore, for example, those with children in the house are not defining only child-related items as ‘essential’).

¹⁹ These decisions about which items to exclude are inevitably rather crude. For example, some respondents may be too ill to be able to drive even if they had a car; or the respondents could be atheists and therefore totally disinterested in the presence or absence of a place of worship. One could even go further than this, and exclude all electrical goods if people did not have electricity in the house, but this starts to obviate the original goal. For the purposes of this section, therefore, only items relating to relationships, employment and child-related items are excluded.

How do these four options map on to the possible responses to the measurement questions in SASAS 2006? The four options are summarised in the table below, along with the possible logical responses to the module for people who do not possess the item being asked about.²⁰

Table 8 Four options that could explain non-possession of items and possible logical responses when completing the SASAS questionnaire

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Have	X	X	X	X
Want	X	X	✓	✓
Afford	X	✓	X	✓
	Possible logical responses			
DHDW	✓ (but may have adapted preferences)	✓	X	X
DHCA	✓	X	✓ (enforced lack)	✓ (a self-inflicted enforced lack)
Don't Know	X	X	X	✓

Note: DHDW=Don't have don't want; DHCA=Don't have can't afford.

It was not possible to include these four options in the module for people to choose from when they did not possess an item. This was because the presence of the four options would have made the module far too complex and tedious to complete. As a result, a 'don't have don't want' category was prioritised. This groups together people in Option 1 and Option 2 shown above, i.e. those who may or may not be able to afford the item and yet do not want it. In doing so, it captures those who are apparently not experiencing an enforced lack because they have specified that they do not want the item.

It was further decided to include the 'don't have can't afford' category as a proxy for Option 3 above. The implicit assumption with the 'don't have can't afford' category is that people in this category *want* to have the item and that they are therefore experiencing an enforced lack. However, as seen in **Table 8** above, the 'don't have can't afford' option could in theory also include people in Option 1 (don't have don't want can't afford), as well as people in Option 4 (people experiencing a 'self-enforced' lack). It would therefore be useful to assess what proportion of people who selected 'don't have can't afford' can legitimately be located within Option 3 and therefore demonstrate the presence of an enforced lack. Unfortunately this cannot be achieved with the current dataset because the questions ask whether the items are essential for all people to have/do/have access to, whereas what we are now seeking to elucidate here is whether the individual wants the item for him/herself. There are several ways in which there can be logical discrepancies between a respondent's views about whether an item is essential for all people, and whether s/he wants that item (this is discussed more in Section 5.4 below). The 'don't have can't afford' category can therefore only really be seen as an approximation for the target group in Option 3 that are experiencing an enforced lack.

²⁰ Mack and Lansley's study additionally distinguished between 'have and couldn't do without' and 'have and could do without' (Mack and Lansley, 1985: 298). This distinction was also made in *Breadline Britain in the 1990s* (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997: 278) but, though considered, was dropped from the PSE (Bradshaw, 1998: 91) and was not used in the South African module.

Mack and Lansley describe ‘don’t have can’t afford’ as a ‘useful approximation for those who have an enforced lack of necessities’ (Mack and Lansley, 1985: 105), but suggest that by selecting this category the extent of deprivation will be underestimated as people may possess only a very poor quality version of the item; people may have converted the enforced lack (due to lack of resources) into a sense of choice, i.e. may have adapted their preferences; and people may say that they have the item in order to avoid the stigma of admitting that they do not possess it.²¹ Levitas also stresses that the avoidance of shame may play a role in people’s responses: ‘The response ‘don’t want’ preserves individual dignity above ‘can’t afford’ (Levitas, 2006: 150).

Two other issues that Levitas raises, which may or may not result in an underestimation of levels of deprivation, are that by forcing people to choose between ‘don’t have don’t want’ and ‘don’t have can’t afford’, alternative constraints are excluded; and objective, experienced and expressed financial constraints are conflated (Levitas, 2006).²² For all these reasons, no wholly accurate distinction can be made between choice and constraint when measuring lack of socially perceived necessities and the ‘don’t have can’t afford’ category therefore continues to be only an approximation of those experiencing an enforced lack of an item.

Having acknowledged these important caveats, what are the actual patterns of non-possession? The ten highest ranking items that are not possessed because the respondents could not afford them are shown in the table below – none of these items are socially perceived necessities. The highest scoring item is the burglar alarm system for the house, where 71% of respondents said that they do not possess it because they cannot afford it.

Table 9 The ten items scoring highest on ‘don’t have can’t afford’

Item	% of All who DHCA	NB % of All who DHDW	NB % of All who possess the item	NB % of All defining the item as ‘essential’
A burglar alarm system for the house	71	16	12	38
An armed response service for the house	67	21	11	28
Satellite Television/DSTV	67	19	13	19
A computer in the home	64	17	18	26
A car	63	7	30	49
A lock-up garage for vehicles	62	16	22	43
Having enough money to give presents on special occasions	61	7	32	41
A small amount of money to spend on yourself not on your family each week	58	10	32	42
A landline phone	57	18	24	48
Washing machine	57	12	32	44

Source: SASAS 2006

²¹ Halleröd also argues that ‘to avoid the subjective feeling of relative deprivation [some people] adapt their preferences and argue that they do not want consumption items they cannot afford.’ (Halleröd, 2006: 376).

²² This links back to Bradshaw’s taxonomy of social need where he distinguishes between ‘expressed need’, ‘felt need’, ‘normative need’, and ‘comparative need’ (1972).

Notes: DHDW=don't have don't want; DHCA=don't have can't afford.

To what extent is there evidence of people choosing not to possess socially perceived necessities, i.e. saying 'don't have don't want' in relation to the socially perceived necessities? If we consider the 27 socially perceived necessities the lack of which could possibly be seen as 'enforced' (i.e. excluding employment, the relationship questions and the child-related questions), we can compare the percentage of people experiencing an enforced lack (those saying 'don't have can't afford') with the percentage of people choosing not to possess the item (those saying 'don't have don't want'), and set this alongside the total percentage of people lacking each item. For the items that are asterisked in the table, we can only consider the unspecified lack as no alternative options were given in the module as they relate to qualities of the neighbourhood. As can be seen in **Table 10** below, only a very small percentage of people said 'don't have don't want' for these 27 socially perceived necessities. The highest percentage of people saying 'don't have don't want' was in relation to a garden (15%), which is the 'least essential' of this set of items. A much higher percentage of people said that they did not have the item because they could not afford it and, not forgetting the caveats introduced above, these represent people experiencing an 'enforced lack' of socially perceived necessities.²³

Table 10 Percentage of people lacking socially perceived necessities (for the 27 'enforced lack' items)

Item	% all saying DHDW	% all saying DHCA	% all without the item ²⁴ (i.e. unspecified lack)
Mains electricity in the house	1	17	18
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather	1	24	25
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	3	16	19
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area?	-	-	16
A fridge	3	28	30
Street lighting*	-	-	49
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	3	32	35
Having police on the streets in the local area*	-	-	55
Tarred roads close to the house*	-	-	48
A flush toilet in the house	6	42	48
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	6	45	52
A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the streets*	-	-	45

²³ As would be expected, the proportions of respondents answering 'don't have can't afford' are much higher in the South African context than has been found in higher income countries. For example, in Sweden the highest rates of 'don't have can't afford' for items defined as 'essential' by more than half of the respondents were 16% for a holiday away from home one week a year not with relatives or friends, followed by new clothes at 7% (Halleröd, 1994b: 26). In contrast, a holiday away from home was not defined as a necessity by the majority of the population in South Africa, and 44% of South African respondents did not possess some new clothes because they could not afford them.

²⁴ This category is the sum of the two previous columns for items where a DHDW/DHCA distinction was made. For the neighbourhood items, it is simply the percentage of people who said they did not have the item in question.

A large supermarket in the local area*	-	-	49
A radio	3	13	16
A fence or wall around the property	4	32	35
Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	3	22	25
Regular savings for emergencies	4	53	57
Television/ TV	3	25	28
A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air*	-	-	47
A cell phone	4	27	31
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	7	44	51
A bath or shower in the house	8	50	58
Burglar bars in the house	9	51	60
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	7	35	42
Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	5	41	46
A sofa/lounge suite	4	32	36
A garden	15	33	48

Source: SASAS 2006

Note: DHCA=Don't have can't afford; DHDW=Don't have don't want.

* = items relating to the neighbourhood.

Given the fact that – excluding the garden - only a small proportion of people choose not to possess socially perceived necessities (by answering ‘don't have don't want’), it seems unlikely that there would be a major difference between summary measures of lack based on ‘don't have can't afford’ and analysis based on an unspecified lack.

3.3 Individual patterns of possession

The previous sections in this paper have focused on the extent to which respondents to the module in SASAS 2006 possess the socially perceived necessities and, if they do not possess them, how one can interpret the reasons that are given (and indeed whether it is worthwhile to explore the reasons given for non-possession).

It was demonstrated that overall, 40 of the 50 items in the module were possessed by a smaller percentage of people than defined it as ‘essential’, i.e. for 80% of the items in the module, fewer people possessed them than regarded them as ‘essential’, on average. What wasn't pursued above was the consequent fact that 10 of the 50 items were therefore defined as ‘essential’ by a smaller percentage of the population than actually possess them. These items are a DVD player, ‘someone to talk to if you are upset or depressed’, a radio, a sofa/lounge suite, a family take-away, a cell phone, a television, visiting family in institutions, special meal for festivals, and a garden.

Though this finding could at first be seen as anomalous, it contains within it several possible and legitimate stances and four examples are provided below. There are several other variants and so these examples do not cover all possible scenarios. The four examples are summarised in **Table 11** below.

Option 1: People might choose not to define an item as essential for the population as a whole and yet might regard it as an essential for themselves and (resources

permitting) therefore possess it. They may or may not regard it as ‘desirable but not essential’ for the population at large.²⁵

Option 2: Closely related to Option 1, some people may not regard the item as essential for the population or for themselves and yet regard it as desirable for themselves and possibly the population as a whole and (resources permitting) therefore possess it.

Option 3: People might choose not to define an item as essential for the population as a whole and additionally do not regard it as essential or desirable for themselves but nevertheless possess the item. There are a number of possible explanations for this category: regarding material possessions, people could have been given the item or have inherited it or may have bought it at a time when they did regard it as being important. Regarding non-material possessions (someone to talk to when upset, and being able to visit friends or relatives in institutions) people may ‘possess’ these but either take them for granted or not see them as important.

Option 4: People may regard an item as essential for the population as a whole, and probably for themselves too, but their view is in the minority and therefore though they possess an item which they regard as essential for everyone to have, it is not seen as such by the majority and the item is therefore not a socially perceived necessity.

Table 11 Four possible options that explain possession of items that are not socially perceived necessities

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Essential for population	X	X	X	✓
Essential for self	✓	X	X	✓
Desirable but not essential for self	X	✓	X	X
Desirable but not essential for population	X or ✓	X or ✓	X or ✓	X

3.3.1 Are individuals more likely to possess items that they define as essential?

It is important to unpack these scenarios in this way because it highlights the tension that can exist between views about oneself and views about the population at large, as well as the tension between one’s own views and the views of the population.²⁶ The scenario in Option 4 was brought to prominence by McKay in the UK context whose main criticism of what he called the ‘consensual deprivation indicators’ approach was that people who lacked some socially perceived necessities almost always possessed items that were not socially perceived necessities:

²⁵ The distinction that a person makes between needs for herself and for others, in financial terms, is explored by Halleröd, (2004).

²⁶ Such tensions exist alongside others including differences of opinion within any given household, and ‘internal contestation’ within individuals (Lavers, 2007: 25-26), as well as the issue of the respondent taking into account what they think that the interviewer might wish to hear, when responding to a survey module (Lalljee *et al.*, 1984).

‘Of those respondents unable to afford two or more goods/services considered to be ‘necessities’ by at least half the population (the group classified as deprived), no less than 99.8 per cent possessed or enjoyed one or more of the 19 items that did not qualify as ‘necessities’.’ (McKay, 2004: 214).

He argued instead that people were probably being driven by their own personal preferences:

‘The likelihood is that respondents arrange their spending patterns to assure that they first meet the items that they themselves regard as being ‘necessities’, rather than what might be said to be ‘necessities’ by half or more of the general population.’ (McKay, 2004: 215).

McKay was only able to test out this hypothesis at an individual level using the UK data for one item – the car – as the definitional questions were in a separate survey from the measurement questions apart from that one item. He found that 91% of those saying a car was essential had access to a car, compared with 72% of those who said a car was not essential (McKay, 2004: 215).

The presence of both the definition and measurement modules in SASAS 2006 enables this issue to be explored for all 50 items in the South African context to gauge the extent to which people who regard an item as essential are more likely to possess it than people who do not define the item as essential. This analysis starts to explore whether there is an association between ‘individually perceived necessities’ (i.e. the items which that particular individual has identified as being essential), and patterns of possession.

Using ‘a bath or shower in the house’ as an example, 62% of people defined it as essential, whereas only 42% of people possess it, with 8% saying that they do not have it and do not want it, and 50% saying that they do not have it and cannot afford it. To what extent are people who regard this item as essential more likely to possess it? Sixty percent of those who defined a bath or shower as essential possessed a bath or shower in the house, whereas only 13% of those who defined it as ‘desirable but not essential’ had a bath or shower in the house. There therefore does seem to be an association between patterns of definition and patterns of possession. **Table 12** below shows the percentage of people defining each item as ‘essential’ and as ‘desirable but not essential’ (in grey), followed in each case respectively by the percentage of people who possess each item for those who define the item in question as ‘essential’ and for those who define it as ‘desirable but not essential’. Taking the first row as an example: of the 92% of all respondents who defined mains electricity as ‘essential’ 83% had mains electricity. Whereas, of the 7% of all respondents who defined mains electricity as ‘desirable but not essential’ only 68% had mains electricity.

Table 12 Possession patterns for those who define each item as ‘essential’ and those who define each item as ‘desirable but not essential’ – top ten items

Item	NB % of All that said ‘essential’	% of those that said ‘essential’ that have the item	NB % of All that said ‘desirable but not essential’	% of those that said ‘desirable but not essential’ that have the item
Mains electricity in the house	92	83	7	68
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	91	89	8	69
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	90	78	9	46
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	89	85	9	53
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area?	87	86	11	60
A fridge	86	73	13	49
Street lighting	85	56	13	16
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	82	70	15	38
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82	78	16	50
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	81	74	16	37

Source: SASAS 2006

Notes: Sorted in descending order of ‘essential’ score. The number of cases in each cell is unique (apart from the cells in the grey columns for which n=2904). The percentages in the ‘essential’ and ‘desirable but not essential’ grey columns are summative across each row but will not always add up to 100% as some people will have said ‘neither desirable nor essential’ or ‘don’t know’ (not shown here). The figures in the non-grey columns are all significant (p<0.001).

Only the ten ‘most essential’ items are shown here (i.e. the ten items defined as most essential overall). However, for *all 50 items* a higher percentage of those who defined the item as essential possessed the item than those who defined the item as ‘desirable but not essential’.²⁷ Also, for all 50 items, a higher percentage of those who defined the item as ‘essential’ possess the item than the percentage of the population overall that possess the item.²⁸ There therefore does appear to be an association between people’s ‘individually perceived necessities’ and patterns of possession.

But is this finding problematic? The reason for McKay’s concern with this issue is summarised as follows:

‘families may be classified as poor using deprivation indicators, when it might be more accurate to say that their consumption preferences deviate from the average.’ (McKay, 2004: 220).

²⁷ This also holds true for ‘paid employment for people of working age’. For this item, the calculation was undertaken for women aged 16-59 and men aged 16-64 only. Unlike the 49 other items (where p<0.001) this item was significant p<0.01.

²⁸ In addition, for all 50 items, a higher percentage of those who defined the item as ‘essential’ possess the item than those who defined the item as ‘neither desirable nor essential’, but these figures are not shown as the latter category often contained very small numbers.

The concern is therefore that the more that someone's preferences map onto the socially perceived necessities, the less likely they are to be classified as poor: people would be more likely to be classified as poor if their preferences were unusual because they would possess their 'individually perceived necessities' and lack the 'socially perceived necessities'. Though they would not regard themselves as poor (as they possessed their individually perceived necessities), they would be identified as such using the socially perceived necessities approach.

However, this presupposes two scenarios which are not apparent in the South African context. First, that there could be a very different set of views about what necessities are, whereby someone could define a 'parallel' set of items as essential that are different from the set of socially perceived necessities. However no compelling evidence has emerged of the existence of such a scenario in either the qualitative or the quantitative stages of the research. Indeed, a very high level of agreement was found in relation to which items are regarded as being essential for an acceptable standard of living (Wright, 2011). Second, the assumption is that one tends to possess items which one regards as being essential whereas this is patently not the case in South Africa: as has been demonstrated in this paper, there are high rates of non-possession of socially perceived necessities, particularly for certain subgroups, and as evidenced in the table above the rates of possession of individually perceived necessities are not as high as might well be the case in higher income countries. Therefore, though people are indeed more likely to possess an item that they define as essential than those who do not regard the item as essential, this does not appear to be problematic for the application of the socially perceived necessities approach in the South African context.²⁹

3.3.2 Mean number of socially perceived necessities and individually perceived necessities possessed by population group and income status

The mean number of socially perceived necessities possessed by all respondents is 21.5. Looking at individually perceived necessities instead, a mean of 20.0 individually perceived necessities are possessed by respondents.³⁰ On average, therefore, there is not a great difference between the mean number of socially perceived necessities possessed and the mean number of individually perceived necessities possessed, with people on average possessing one and a half more socially perceived necessities than individually perceived necessities.³¹

Given the striking differences between possession rates by population group presented above, the following table explores the mean number of items defined as 'essential' by population group, and the mean number of 'essential' items possessed by

²⁹ Notwithstanding these points, as the views about necessities are not unanimous (i.e. because items are not defined as 'essential' by 100% of the population) none of the 'lacks' will automatically equate with a situation of deprivation.

³⁰ The number of socially perceived necessities possessed and individually perceived necessities possessed for each individual correlates 0.9 ($p < 0.0001$).

³¹ Looking instead at the average *proportion* of necessities possessed, people on average possess 64% of their individually perceived necessities, compared with 60% of socially perceived necessities.

population group, both for socially perceived necessities and individually perceived necessities.

Table 13 Mean number of SPNs and IPNs possessed, by population group

	All	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White
Mean number of items defined as necessities (from a list of 50 items)	32 (30.9-32.3)	31 (31.5-32.3)	30 (28.5-31.3)	33 (31.8-34.1)	34 (32.3-35.8)
Mean number of socially perceived necessities possessed (from a list of 36 items)	22 (21.0-22.1)	19 (18.5-19.9)	26 (24.9-27.0)	31 (30.5-31.8)	32 (30.8-32.4)
Mean number of individually perceived necessities possessed	20 (19.3-20.7)	18 (16.7-18.5)	24 (22.1-24.8)	29 (27.6-29.8)	31 (29.2-32.8)

Source: SASAS 2006

Note: 95% Confidence intervals shown in brackets. SPN=Socially Perceived Necessity (50% threshold); IPN=Individually Perceived Necessity.

This table also tells a striking tale. On average, 32 of the 50 items were defined as essential by respondents to the questionnaire. By population group, the average number of items defined as essential ranges from 30 (coloured respondents) to 34 (white respondents), with black African and Indian/Asian respondents defining 31 and 33 items as essential respectively on average. This suggests that the aspirations of South Africans do not differ greatly by population group, certainly in terms of number of items defined as essential from the list of 50. However, the mean number of socially perceived necessities that are actually possessed ranges from 19 for black African respondents to 32 for white respondents, with coloured and Indian/Asian respondents possessing 26 and 31 socially perceived necessities respectively on average. The same pattern is repeated when possession of individually perceived necessities are examined, though - as for the population as a whole - people in each of the population groups possess a slightly smaller number of individually perceived necessities than socially perceived necessities.³²

If one considers the black African respondents, for whom the discrepancy is the greatest - in terms of number of socially perceived necessities possessed (19) and number of items defined as essential (31) - **Table 5** can be used to identify the socially perceived necessities that are most likely to be lacked by black African people. There are sixteen socially perceived necessities that are possessed by at least 40 percentage points fewer black African people than white people: these are likely candidates for items defined as essential but not possessed. These items are: street lighting, tarred roads, a flush toilet, ability to afford prescribed medicines, a neighbourhood without rubbish, a large supermarket, someone to transport you in an emergency, a safe play area for children, a neighbourhood without smog,

³² This is probably due to the fact that individually perceived necessities can be drawn from any of the 50 items whereas the socially perceived necessities comprise 36 items, but the extent of agreement between the two approaches is nevertheless very striking. Analysis was also undertaken by population group to look at the *proportion* of socially perceived necessities possessed and individually perceived necessities possessed. These rates are (respectively) 53% and 58% for black Africans, 72% and 79% for coloured respondents, 86% and 87% for Indian/Asians, and 88% and 91% for whites.

meat/fish/vegetarian equivalent every day, a bath/shower, burglar bars, special meal at Christmas or equivalent, some new clothes, sofa/lounge, and a garden.³³

The following table compares people who fall above and below the R847 income per capita per month threshold. On average, 34 items are defined as essential by those falling above this income threshold, compared with 31 items for those below the threshold. However, an average of 8 more socially perceived necessities are possessed by people above this threshold (28) than for people below the threshold (19). The same pattern can be seen in relation to possession of individually perceived necessities, with 27 and 18 such items being possessed on average respectively.

Table 14 Mean number of SPNs and IPNs possessed, by monthly per capita income

	All	Above R847 per capita	Below R847 per capita
Mean number of items defined as necessities (from a list of 50 items)	32 (30.9-32.3)	34 (32.9-35.1)	31 (29.8-31.6)
Mean number of socially perceived necessities possessed	22 (21.0-22.1)	28 (26.7-28.5)	19 (18.7-20.0)
Mean number of individually perceived necessities possessed	20 (19.3-20.7)	27 (25.3-27.8)	18 (16.7-18.4)

Source: SASAS 2006

Note: 95% Confidence intervals shown in brackets. SPN=Socially Perceived Necessity (50% threshold); IPN=Individually Perceived Necessity. The sixth imputation was used for the income variable.

These two tables demonstrate that although there is considerable agreement in terms of people's aspirations for the country as a whole³⁴ – at least in terms of number of items selected from the list of 50 – there is nevertheless a marked discrepancy in terms of average number of essential items possessed, for the different population groups and for those above and below the threshold of the income deprivation indicator. This pattern occurs for the individually perceived necessities and the socially perceived necessities.

4 Concluding remarks

This paper has focussed on issues relating to patterns of possession of the socially perceived necessities. It has been demonstrated that 78% of the socially perceived necessities are possessed by a smaller percentage of people than the percentage of people defining each item as essential – this suggests a considerable mismatch between people's notion of an acceptable standard of living and the reality of people's actual standards of living. Though the patterns of possession do not differ greatly by sex, they do differ greatly by population group and income, with black African respondents having the lowest possession rates for all but three of the socially perceived necessities. The overall possession rates were found to be largely in line

³³ The first six of these items are defined as essential by at least 70% of black African respondents and yet are possessed by less than half.

³⁴ It should be remembered that the definitional questions asked whether the items were essential for *all* people in South Africa to have.

with other data sources (questions elsewhere within SASAS 2006 and the entirely separate 2007 Community Survey), for items which could be compared.

Patterns of non-possession of items were then explored. None of the items that had the lowest possession rates were socially perceived necessities, and when people responded to items that were socially perceived necessities only a tiny proportion responded 'don't have don't want' if they didn't have the item, with much higher percentages responding 'don't have can't afford', suggesting that the lack of these items is mainly enforced.

The next section looked at how 'individually perceived necessities' compared with socially perceived necessities, for the population as a whole and by population group and income. Reasons for possessing non-socially perceived necessities were discussed. Analysis was undertaken to explore whether those who defined an item as essential were more likely to possess the item than those who defined the item as 'desirable but not essential' and this was found to be the case. Though there is a fairly common view about number of items that are essential across population groups, the average number of essential items actually possessed by each population group differs greatly, with black African people possessing the smallest number. These findings hold true whether one considers socially perceived or individually perceived necessities.

As raised earlier, one of McKay's hypotheses is that people who define an item as essential are more likely to possess it. Conversely, it may be the case that those who possess an item are more likely to define it as essential. Returning to the example of the bath or shower in the house, of those who possessed a bath or shower in the house, 89% defined it as essential. In contrast, 46% of those who said they do not have it and cannot afford it defined it as essential, and 22% of those who said they do not have it and do not want it defined it as essential. Van den Bosch's work in Belgium led to the conclusion that:

'possession status (i.e. whether or not the household possesses the given item, and if not, whether it desires it or not) has evidently a very large effect on perceptions of necessities, which generally surpasses that of all other variables combined.' (Van den Bosch, 1998: 149)

The socially perceived necessities literature pays serious attention to the issue of adaptive preferences (e.g. Halleröd, 2006; McKay, 2004; Van den Bosch, 1998). Having presented the analysis in Wright (2011) about defining the necessities and in this paper about possession of the necessities, it is now possible to explore in greater depth the extent to which South African people's definitions of necessities are associated with their own contexts, whether these are demographic, spatial, income or class-related, driven by people's reference groups, or linked in some way to their own patterns of possession.

Annex 1 The Socially Perceived Necessities Module in SASAS 2006

DEFINITIONS OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Please say whether you think each of the following is essential for everyone to have in order to enjoy an acceptable standard of living in South Africa today. If you think it is essential please say 'ESSENTIAL'. If you think it is desirable but not essential please say 'DESIRABLE'. If you think it is not essential and not desirable please say 'NEITHER'. So the three possible answers are 'ESSENTIAL', 'DESIRABLE' or 'NEITHER'.

	Item	Essential	Desirable	Neither	(Do not know)
1.	A fridge	1	2	3	8
2.	Having enough money to give presents on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, funerals	1	2	3	8
3.	Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	1	2	3	8
4.	A landline phone	1	2	3	8
5.	Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	1	2	3	8
6.	Washing machine	1	2	3	8
7.	Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	1	2	3	8
8.	For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with	1	2	3	8
9.	Satellite Television/DSTV	1	2	3	8
10.	Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	1	2	3	8
11.	Regular savings for emergencies	1	2	3	8
12.	A small amount of money to spend on yourself not on your family each week	1	2	3	8
13.	Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	1	2	3	8
14.	A cell phone	1	2	3	8
15.	Television/ TV	1	2	3	8
16.	A car	1	2	3	8
17.	People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	1	2	3	8
18.	A sofa/lounge suite	1	2	3	8
19.	A computer in the home	1	2	3	8
20.	An armed response service for the house	1	2	3	8
21.	A DVD player	1	2	3	8
22.	For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	1	2	3	8
23.	A radio	1	2	3	8
24.	Burglar bars in the house	1	2	3	8
25.	Mains electricity in the house	1	2	3	8
26.	A flush toilet in the house	1	2	3	8
27.	Separate bedrooms for adults and children	1	2	3	8
28.	A fence or wall around the property	1	2	3	8
29.	A garden	1	2	3	8
30.	A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	1	2	3	8
31.	A bath or shower in the house	1	2	3	8

32.	A burglar alarm system for the house	1	2	3	8
33.	A lock-up garage for vehicles	1	2	3	8

Please say whether you think each of the following activities are essential for everyone to be able to do in South Africa today. If you think they are essential please say 'ESSENTIAL'. If you think they are desirable but not essential please say 'DESIRABLE'. If you think they are not essential and not desirable please say 'NEITHER'.

	Activity	Essential	Desirable	Neither	(Do not know)
34.	A holiday away from home for one week a year, not visiting relatives	1	2	3	8
35.	Paid employment for people of working age	1	2	3	8
36.	Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	1	2	3	8
37.	A family take-away or bring-home meal once a month	1	2	3	8

I am now going to read you a list of features relating to neighbourhoods. Please say whether you think each of the following are essential for everyone to have in South Africa today. If you think it is essential please say 'ESSENTIAL'. If you think it is desirable but not essential please say 'DESIRABLE'. If you think it is not essential and not desirable please say 'NEITHER'.

	Item	Essential	Desirable	Neither	(Do not know)
38.	Tarred roads close to the house	1	2	3	8
39.	Street lighting	1	2	3	8
40.	A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area?	1	2	3	8
41.	A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	1	2	3	8
42.	A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the streets	1	2	3	8
43.	Having police on the streets in the local area	1	2	3	8
44.	A large supermarket in the local area	1	2	3	8
45.	Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	1	2	3	8

I am now going to ask you some questions about people's relationships with their friends and family. Please say whether you think each of the following are essential for everyone to have in South Africa today. If you think it is essential please say 'ESSENTIAL'. If you think it is desirable but not essential please say 'DESIRABLE'. If you think it is not essential and not desirable please say 'NEITHER'.

	Item	Essential	Desirable	Neither	(Do not know)
46.	Someone to look after you if you are very ill	1	2	3	8
47.	Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	1	2	3	8
48.	Someone to lend you money in an emergency	1	2	3	8
49.	Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	1	2	3	8
50.	Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	2	3	8

MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Please say whether you have each of the following. If you do not have the item please say whether you don't have it and don't want it, or don't have it and can't afford it. So the three possible answers are 'HAVE', 'DON'T HAVE AND DON'T WANT' or 'DON'T HAVE AND CAN'T AFFORD'.

	Item	Have	Don't have and don't want	Don't have and can't afford	(Do not know)
51.	A fridge in the household	1	2	3	8
52.	Having enough money to give presents on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, funerals	1	2	3	8
53.	Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	1	2	3	8
54.	A landline phone in the household	1	2	3	8
55.	Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	1	2	3	8
56.	Washing machine in the household	1	2	3	8
57.	Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	1	2	3	8
58.	Toys for children to play with (if you have children)	1	2	3	8
59.	Satellite Television/DSTV in the household	1	2	3	8
60.	Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	1	2	3	8
61.	Regular savings for emergencies	1	2	3	8
62.	A small amount of money to spend on yourself not on your family each week	1	2	3	8
63.	Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	1	2	3	8
64.	A cell phone	1	2	3	8
65.	Television/ TV in the household	1	2	3	8
66.	A car in the household that you can use	1	2	3	8
67.	Medicines prescribed by your doctor when you are ill	1	2	3	8
68.	A sofa/lounge suite in the household	1	2	3	8
69.	A computer in the household	1	2	3	8
70.	An armed response service for the house	1	2	3	8
71.	A DVD player in the household	1	2	3	8
72.	School uniforms for children (if you have children)	1	2	3	8
73.	A radio in the household	1	2	3	8
74.	Burglar bars in the household	1	2	3	8
75.	Mains electricity in the house	1	2	3	8
76.	A flush toilet in the house	1	2	3	8
77.	Separate bedrooms for adults and children	1	2	3	8
78.	A fence or wall around the property	1	2	3	8
79.	A garden	1	2	3	8
80.	A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	1	2	3	8
81.	A bath or shower in the house	1	2	3	8
82.	A burglar alarm system for the household	1	2	3	8
83.	A lock-up garage for vehicles	1	2	3	8

Please say whether you are able to do the following activities. If you don't do them please say whether you don't do them because you don't want to do them, or you don't do them because you can't afford to. So the three possible answers are 'DO', 'DON'T DO AND DON'T WANT TO DO' or 'DON'T DO AND CAN'T AFFORD'.

	Activity	Do	Don't do and don't want to do	Don't do and can't afford	(Do not know)
84.	A holiday away from home for one week a year, not visiting relatives	1	2	3	8
85.	Being able to visit friends and family in hospital or other institutions	1	2	3	8
86.	A family take-away or bring-home meal once a month	1	2	3	8

I am now going to read you a list of features relating to neighbourhoods. Please say whether you have them or not. So the two possible answers are 'HAVE' and 'DON'T HAVE'.

	Item	Have	Don't Have	(Do not know)
87.	Tarred roads close to the house	1	2	8
88.	Street lighting	1	2	8
89.	A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area?	1	2	8
90.	A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	1	2	8
91.	A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the streets	1	2	8
92.	Having police on the streets in the local area	1	2	8
93.	A large supermarket in the local area	1	2	8
94.	Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	1	2	8

I am now going to ask you some questions about your relationships with friends and family. Please say whether you have or don't have access to these. So the two possible answers are 'HAVE' and 'DON'T HAVE'.

	Item	Have	Don't Have	(Do not know)
95.	Someone to look after you if you are very ill	1	2	8
96.	Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	1	2	8
97.	Someone to lend you money in an emergency	1	2	8
98.	Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	1	2	8
99.	Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	1	2	8

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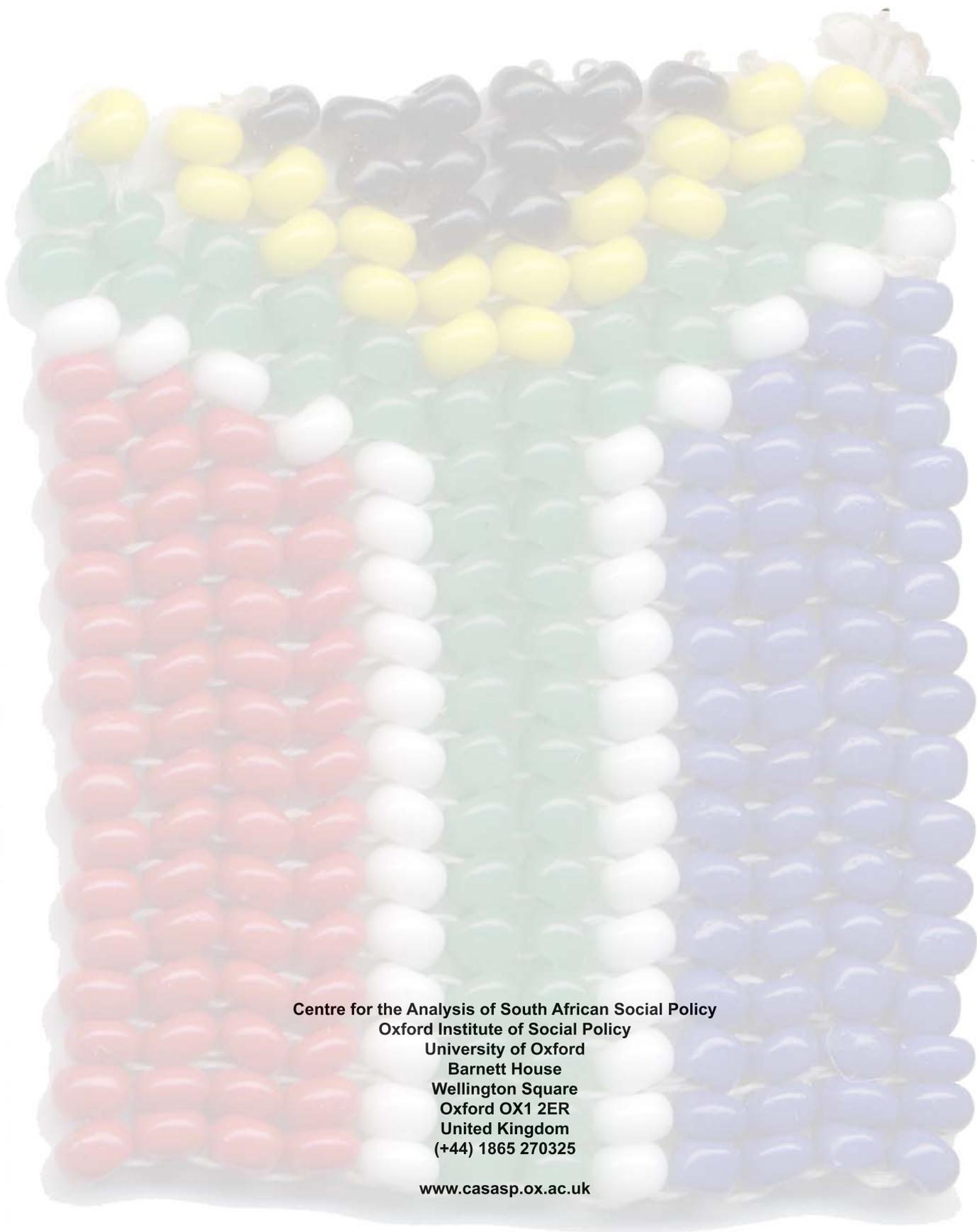
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