Submission by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) National Investigative Hearing into the July Unrest in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces
Wednesday, 2 March 2022

Introduction

Invitation from the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) has been invited by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to participate in its National Investigative Hearing into the July Unrest in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces. In its letter to the GCRO dated 21 February 2022, the SAHRC states that it would like to get "a complete and nuanced picture of the causes, nature and effects of the Unrest, [and] we are inviting academics and specialist practitioners to share their knowledge and expertise with the Commission". Specifically, the GCRO has been asked to share insights based on its most recent Quality of Life Survey (QoL). The Commission hopes that this will enable it to glean the "social, economic, spatial and political factors prevalent in the various affected areas and the extent to which these played a role in the unrest". Understanding these factors is among the National Investigative Hearing's terms of reference.

The GCRO is of the view that the mandate of the Commission to protect and promote human rights in the country is an essential ingredient in maintaining our democracy that was established in 1994. The events of July 2021 are unprecedented in the history of post-apartheid South Africa and evidently compromised human rights in the country. The GCRO welcomes the National Investigative Hearing into the July Unrest, and is happy to provide the SAHRC with the required insights drawn from its Quality of Life Survey.

About the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO)

The GCRO has been established as a partnership between the Gauteng Provincial Government, SA Local Government Association (Gauteng), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ). The GCRO helps to build the knowledge base needed to make the Gauteng City-Region more functionally integrated, spatially coherent, economically competitive, innovative, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. The GCRO collects and analyses data, provides policy analysis, undertakes applied research and publishes critically reflective academic research. While the GCRO receives core funding from the Gauteng Provincial

Government, and in kind support from UJ and Wits, it functions as a separate academic and applied research centre, and the views and opinions expressed in this submission do not reflect those of any of its partners.

This submission has been prepared by GCRO staff members, including Rashid Seedat (Executive Director), Graeme Gotz (Director Research Strategy), Dr Laven Naidoo (Senior Researcher) and Dr Mamokete Matjomane (Researcher). The submission is in turn based on a wide range of materials generated by other GCRO staff in the process of disseminating findings from its 6th Quality of Life Survey, conducted over the course of 2020 and 2021. These materials include a comprehensive Overview Report, a Data Brief focused on the effects of COVID on Gauteng, press briefings and presentations prepared for the launch of the QoL data on 9 September 2021, and subsequent opinion pieces published in a variety of media.

About the Quality of Life Survey

The Quality of Life Survey (QoL) is a household based social conditions and social attitudes survey conducted by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) every two years. It provides the government and residents of Gauteng with a holistic overview of life in the province, drawn from interviews with randomly sampled adults living in each of the province's electoral wards. Based on a questionnaire with over 200 questions, the survey documents material living conditions, but also the perceptions, experiences, opinions and beliefs of residents. A particularly important component of the survey is a bank of questions that reflect on satisfaction with public services and satisfaction with government.

First run in 2009, and then with subsequent iterations in 2011, 2013/14, 2015/16, 2017/18 and most recently 2020/21, QoL is one of South Africa's largest and longest running social surveys. Indicatively the 2017/18 iteration of the survey had 24 889 respondents and the 2020/21 survey interviewed 13 616 respondents. Respondents are always adults (18 years and above) who are randomly sampled by fieldworkers physically visiting homes across the province. Households are also randomly selected to ensure that no in-built bias – for example in terms of race, class, dwelling type, or neighbourhood characteristics – skews the survey results. The data derived from the survey is carefully weighted to reflect the share of the adult population in each part of the province, and the race and sex distribution of that population. The results are therefore statistically reliable and representative of the population of Gauteng at various spatial scales.

The methodology for the Quality of Life Survey has remained broadly consistent over time, as has its core questionnaire content. This means that much of the data is comparable over time, and can therefore be used to monitor objective measures of progress and development; discern changing patterns in residents' subjective sense of well-being; and identify new challenges – in a wide range of areas such as health, employment, service delivery, crime, social cohesion, poverty and food security, etc – as they arise.

An important feature of the QoL survey findings is the Quality of Life Index. The Index is a carefully calculated and weighted score out of 100 that combines the results of 33 different survey questions. These same 33 questions have been asked in every QoL iteration, and so the QoL Index provides a consistent single composite measure of how overall multidimensional well-being is changing in Gauteng.

This submission is based on the results from the 6th Quality of Life Survey, with some comparisons to results from earlier QoLs where relevant. For QoL 6 we interviewed a minimum of 600 respondents in each of Gauteng's nine municipalities, and substantially larger numbers in more heavily populated municipalities. Interviews were conducted in each and every one of the 529 wards in Gauteng, with a minimum of 20 interviews in each. Fieldwork for QoL 6 (2020/21) started in October 2020. Conducted through the unprecedented and very difficult context of COVID-19 – and in particular the second wave over December 2020 and January 2021 – fieldwork was completed at the end of May 2021. A total sample of 13 616 interviews was realised. Results were publicly launched on 9 September 2021.

It is important to note that the timing of the fieldwork means that results can reflect on the extremely challenging social, economic and governance context in the period preceding the July unrest, but the survey did not cover the period of the severe Delta wave of COVID-19 over June and July 2021, nor the time immediately before or after the unrest.

Annexures

As noted, this submission draws on a range of outputs written by various GCRO staff. Should the Commission be interested in further details on the Quality of Life Survey findings, this submission is accompanied by three Annexures:

A) de Kadt, J., Hamann, C., Mkhize, S.P., & Parker, A. (Eds.). (2021). Quality of Life Survey 6 (2020/21): Overview Report. Johannesburg: Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO).
B) Maree, G. Culwick Fatti, C. Götz, G. Hamann, C. and Parker, A. (2021). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Gauteng City-Region: findings from the GCRO's Quality of Life Survey 6 (2020/21), GCRO DataBrief #11, September 2021.
C) Gauteng City-Region Observatory (2021). Covid fallout: Vulnerability and signs of recovery in Gauteng, Daily Maverick, 9 September 2021.

Key insights from the Quality of Life Survey 6 (2020/21)

Impact of COVID on households and daily life

The Quality of Life Survey 6 (2020/21) indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the everyday functioning of households and household members' daily lives.

By the completion of QoL 6 (2020/21) fieldwork in May 2021, 2.7% of respondents reported that they or another member of their household had received a medically confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis. While that percentage does not seem very high, it is based on respondents' affirmation that a positive test had been received by someone in their household. Using Statistics South Africa's 2021 mid year population estimates, this figure can be extrapolated to 424 702 people. Official figures for the cumulative number of positive COVID-19 tests at the end of May 2021 was 450 377 -- suggesting that the QoL survey figures do seem to fairly accurately reflect official positive test numbers at the time it was concluded.

Of course we are aware that the official positive test numbers significantly underestimate the actual spread of COVID-19 through the population, given that many cases were asymptomatic, testing was not always accurate, and that because of the time or financial cost of tests many residents who were sick did not go to get tested. The QoL 6 (2020/21) survey also picks up another dimension. We asked respondents whether they had tried to test for COVID but were refused. Overall, 2.2% of respondents reported not being able to access COVID-19 testing when they believed they needed it. The figure was higher for Africans, at 2,2%, and coloureds, at 3,3%, than for Indians/Asians at 1,2%

and whites at 1,1%. The percentage of those who tried to test for COVID-19 but were refused was also significantly higher in the lowest monthly household income bracket of R1-800 at 2,4% than it was for the wealthiest bracket of +R51 201, where just 0,8% were refused testing. This likely reflects the uneven reliance on public versus private healthcare, and in turn the greater stress carried by poorer residents of not being able to determine whether they had COVID-19 or not.

The pandemic impacted dramatically on daily life in various ways. Asked what their households had done to avoid COVID-19, 92% of respondents said they had avoided public spaces and gatherings, indicating significant impacts across the population on urban social life, the ability to participate in normal social settings and forge social bonds and connections. Eighty-nine percent of respondents said that they had bought alcohol-based sanitiser, suggesting that most households bore new and unanticipated costs. Indicative of wider disruptions to daily movement patterns, 25% of respondents said that members of their households had had to change their normal mode of transport, and 35% said there had been a change in where their household usually bought groceries.

QoL data indicates a marked impact on schooling, even when reduced lockdown levels permitted a return to school. Thirty-nine percent of households with children kept children away from school when they were allowed to return. The percentage was significantly higher for African respondents (at 41%) than for white respondents (at 28%). Of those respondents who kept children out of school even when they could return, 63% did not have access to a working computer and 80% did not have internet access, suggesting little potential for learning at home. The data suggests that the COVID-19's impact on education extended well beyond temporary school closures, and the impact was significantly greater for children from poorer households already at a disadvantage.

More than a quarter of respondents (28%) reported that they had spent more time than usual looking after children or other family members since March 2020. The additional caring of relatives has fallen disproportionately to women, with 50% of female respondents with family commitments spending more time on caring for relatives than male respondents (28%).

Economic and socio-economic impacts

The Quality of Life Survey 6 provides evidence that COVID-19 has had deep socio-economic impacts, but these impacts vary by population group, sex and income group. In general terms, it seems that white respondents, males and those from higher income groups have been relatively better shielded from the most negative impacts. Black Africans, females and the lowest income groups have been more heavily impacted in a range of ways, although it is also clear that some social and economic support has provided a degree of protection to the most vulnerable.

The economic impact of the pandemic has been widespread and severe, with more than half (55%) of all respondents being impacted directly by at least one of five economic impact indicators (had working hours reduced, lost a job, permanently closed a business, in the labour market and spent more time caring for dependents, and health impacted ability to do daily work). This has translated into increased stress and pressure on households but also wider socio-economic effects: those directly impacted were more likely to have missed debt repayments, been unable to pay municipal bills and to skip meals.

Almost a third of respondents (30%) who were working saw salaries and working hours reduced in the period following March 2020. Those with higher levels of education (where we know that lower education equates with poorer socio-economic circumstances), and those coming from households with higher monthly incomes, were more affected. Similarly, white respondents seem to have been impacted by reductions in salary and working hours than Black African respondents. This seems counterintuitive, but it needs to be contextualised by looking at other economic impacts.

According to QoL 6, approximately one in five (18%) of respondents who were working lost a job following March 2020. However, here the disaggregated picture is the reverse of that with salary and working hours reduced. For example 13% of those with higher education lost jobs, compared with over 20% for those with no or little schooling. Some 12% of white respondents lost jobs compared to around 20% for all other race groups. So in a nutshell, white respondents and those with better education saw the lesser pain of working hours and salary reductions, but their jobs were relatively more protected. By contrast, the already more vulnerable experienced less salary reductions but instead were exposed to the much more serious impact of lost employment.

One in ten respondents who owned a business had to close it permanently in the pandemic. Only 5% of applicable White respondents say they permanently closed a business, compared to 10% of Black Africans and 16% of Indians/Asians.

Because the survey asked respondents to tell us about whether they are currently working or not, it is possible to see to what extent those who lost a job or had to permanently close a business have found new work. Overall the results are bleak. Of those who had lost a job or closed a business since March 2021, 50% were unemployed and looking for work, or jobless and discouraged, at the time the interview was conducted. A further 7% had dropped out of the labour market. Some 44% have found new work. If we look across different demographic and socio-economic categories we can further see that there were big differences in who has been able to recover. Some 52% of white respondents who lost their livelihoods had new work by the time the interview was conducted, compared to just 43% of Black Africans. Similarly those with lower education seem to have been less able to recover than those with matric or post graduate degrees. The starkest difference here was between males and females. Forty-nine percent (49%) of males who lost jobs or closed businesses had work again, compared to just 37% of females.

QoL data is also able to tell us something about the kind of work that those who lost jobs or closed businesses during the pandemic have been able to find since losing livelihoods. When the new employment for those impacted is compared to the employment of those not impacted, serious concerns emerge. The new employment of those who lost jobs or closed businesses is much more precarious than that for the labour market as a whole. Only 48% of those economically impacted during the first year of COVID-19 now work in the formal sector, compared to 68% of those not impacted. Only 52% of those impacted now work full time, compared to 77% of those not impacted. 57% of those impacted are self-employed, compared to just 28% of those not impacted. Only 56% of those impacted are now satisfied with the working conditions in their jobs, compared to 71% satisfied for those not impacted.

QoL data suggests there was a significant Increase in the proportion of households living below the poverty line as a result of the pandemic's economic impacts. This has reversed positive gains achieved over the past decade. Previous surveys have painted a picture of gradually reducing poverty levels. In the 2013/14 survey 35% of respondents were from households where aggregate monthly income meant that members were living below the poverty line. In 2015/16 this had reduced to 24%, and in 2017/18 to 20%. In 2020/21 the proportion of households living below the poverty line had jumped back to above 2013/14 levels, at 36%.

Alongside the increase in the proportion of households living below the poverty line, there has been a decrease in the proportion of households in typically lower-middle and middle-income brackets of between R801 and R12 800 per month. This is significant because it means that poverty has been deepened not only because the poorest have been heavily impacted, but because those clinging precariously to the middle rungs of the class ladder have been pushed back down into poverty.

QoL data indicates that inequality between income groups remains significant and this translates to different levels of access and living experiences in the city-region. For instance, the chronic poor (in the bracket R1-800) and working poor (R801-R3200) have far higher proportions of adults and children who skipped a meal than those in higher income groups.

Over half (52%) of Gauteng households are experiencing food insecurity. Larger households of six or more members are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity as they are not spending enough to meet basic nutritional needs. Our measure of food security looks at expenditure on nutritious food basket, whether children or adults in a household have skipped a meal in the past year and access to places to purchase food. There is a steady upward trend of adults in households that have skipped a meal due to lack of buying power (in 2020/21, 25% of adults in households have skipped a meal). The proportion of children in households who have skipped a meal marginally declines from 21% in 2017/18 to 20% in 2020/21. In contrast to this bleak picture, the proportion of households with children benefiting from the school feeding scheme is increasing over time. Thirteen percent of all households said they received food support from either the government or an NGO over the pandemic. Forty-four percent of children benefited from a school feeding scheme in 2020/21 compared to 38% in 2017/18 and 29% in 2015/16.

Social conditions

Despite various forms of support, results from the survey show that the pandemic has taken a toll on people's physical and psychological well-being. Self-reported health, mental health, and overall satisfaction with life, have all worsened relative to 2017/18.

The proportion of QoL respondents self-reporting poor or very poor health status was at 12% in 2020/21, an increase of 5 percentage points since 2017/18. This worsening picture was not evenly distributed across the population. Black African respondents were more likely to report poor or very poor health status (at 13%) than white respondents (at 9%). More worryingly, Black African respondents reported a much more significant deterioration in health status between 2017/18 and 2020/21. This population group saw an increase of six percentage points in the proportion reporting poor or very poor health status, from 7% in 2017/18 to 13% this time around. By contrast the percentage of white respondents reporting poor or very poor health increased just three percentage points, from 6% to 9%.

The Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) is a simple screening method to test for risk of depression. It is based on two questions. "Over the last 2 weeks, how many days have you been bothered by the following problems? (1) Little interest or pleasure in doing things, or (2) Feeling down, depressed or hopeless". If people say 'Not at all' they get a score of 0. If they say 'Nearly every day' they get a score of 3. Combining the two questions gives a total POTENTIAL score of 6. Adding up the responses, if the total is 3 or more the respondent is said to be 'at high risk of depression. Using this simple screening tool for depression, our data shows that 14% of Gauteng's residents were at high risk of depression in 2020/21. This was an increase from 12% in 2017/18.

African respondents are more likely than other population groups to be at high risk of depression in 2020/21, and they represent the only population group that has experienced an increase in the risk of depression since 2017/18. The results also suggest a strong relationship between economic hardship and the risk of depression. The relationship between food insecurity and the likelihood of being at high risk of depression is particularly striking. Adults living in households with no food insecurity were less likely to be at high risk of depression (10%) when compared to the general population. For those living in households experiencing mild food insecurity, this rose to 15%. By contrast, more than one in five (20%) of those living in households experiencing severe food insecurity were at high risk of depression – in other words they were more than twice as likely to be at high risk when compared to those experiencing little or no food insecurity.

The QoL survey has traditionally asked a set of questions around various aspects of 'life satisfaction'. Three such questions are whether the respondent is satisfied or dissatisfied with their marriage/relationship; their family life; and their friends. On all three questions QoL 6 presents a gloomy picture. There was a marked increase in the percentage of respondents saying they were dissatisfied with their marriage, from 6% in 2017/18 to 9% in 2020/21. There was a five percentage point increase from 13% to 18% in the proportion of respondents saying that they are dissatisfied with family life, either the time they're able to spend with family or what they do with family. And the percentage of respondents saying they were dissatisfied with friends increased from 10% to 12%.

For the first time ever the Quality of Life Survey asked a bank of questions into respondents' experience of violence. Due to the sensitive nature of these questions, they were included as a self-complete section at the end of the survey in which 87% of respondents participated. Because these questions were being asked for the first time we have no way of comparing results with earlier iterations of the survey, and in turn no way of saying whether the current dire socio-economic circumstances had made the context for violence worse. However, it can be said that the data paints a very concerning picture of a society in which residents experience significant levels of violence. Indicatively, 66% of respondents reported having experienced one of more forms of abuse during their childhood. 65% had been beaten with a belt, stick or other hard object as children, and 11% had been sexually abused. When asked about exposure to violence in the past year, 16% of respondents reported experiencing some form of physical trauma, including being hit, kicked, or being threatened or hurt by a gun or knife. Male respondents were more likely to have experienced physical trauma – one in five had done so in the past year, with 14% having been threatened or hurt by a knife or gun. Young men are particularly vulnerable: 31% of males ages 18-24 had experienced physical trauma in the past year. 1.7% of women had experienced rape in the past year, and 5,1% of women had suffered Intimate Parner Violence over the previous 12 months.

Declining satisfaction with government

Various government programmes were introduced to provide some relief to the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, adults in a third of all households applied for the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant. Two thirds of applying households received at least one SRD grant.QoL respondents appeared generally happy with the government response to COVID-19.

Some two thirds (62%) of QoL respondents said they were satisfied with government's overall response. This is substantially higher than satisfaction with national government in general. That said, satisfaction with government's pandemic response did vary during data collection – it was at its lowest during the height of the second wave.

QoL 6 (2020/21) provides evidence that household service delivery remained high and even improved in some areas. However, COVID-19 has clearly impacted service operations where there were pre-existing weaknesses in service delivery capacity. For example there has been an increase in the percentage of respondents reporting water service interruptions. Following a trend seen in previous QoL Surveys, satisfaction with government's response to COVID-19 and with many (though not all) services has not carried through into satisfaction with government performance as a whole.

QoL data indicates significant declines in residents' trust in government, faith in public servants' ability to do a good job, and confidence in the future of the country. The proportion of respondents who think that government officials adhere to the public service principles of Batho Pele – putting people first – declined markedly, from 36% in 2017/18 to 17% in 2020/21. Only 24% said that they trust the current leaders in government; only 17% agree that leaders from different parts of government work well together; and only 18% agree that leaders include most stakeholders in decision making. In 2017/18, 18% of respondents strongly agreed that the country was going in the wrong direction; this increased to 24% in 2020/21.

The decline in trust and confidence in the future has translated into a steep decline in satisfaction with government. Satisfaction with all spheres of government dropped considerably between QoL 5, run in 2017/18, and 2020/21. Provincial government has seen the largest decline in satisfaction, dropping 15 percentage points from 44% satisfied in 2017/18, to 29% satisfied in 2020/21. This reverses a trend towards higher levels of satisfaction with provincial government, especially relative to national, between 2013/14 and 2017/18

There is evidence that the trust deficit, and its impact on satisfaction with government, has been exacerbated by revelations of corruption. Job creation and keeping the government free from corruption were the main issues that respondents felt the government was doing the worst at. Most respondents said that different aspects of corruption were not acceptable, and there is a clear correlation between beliefs in the unacceptability of corruption and lower levels of satisfaction with government. Those who identified corruption as the main thing that the government is doing the worst at, and those who flagged corruption as the key reason that people still live in poverty, have lower levels of satisfaction with the provincial government than other respondents.

Using a basket of indicators to determine whether households have been directly impacted by COVID-19 (whether they have had COVID-19 or sought COVID-19 testing, or whether they lost a job, closed a business, or had salary or working hours reduced), it is clear that those who have been directly affected by COVID-19 have a lower level of satisfaction with provincial government than those who have not been affected.

Interestingly, whether a household received some form of COVID-19-related relief from government did not seem to significantly improve their satisfaction with government. 29% of respondents who did not need the social relief in distress (SRD) grant were satisfied with provincial government; of those who applied for the grant but did not get it, 25% were satisfied with provincial government; and of those who did get the grant the percent satisfied with provincial government was the same as the average, 29%.

Overall happiness with government's response to COVID did however make a difference. Of respondents who said that they were satisfied with government's response to COVID-19, 37% said they were satisfied with the provincial government. This compared to a much lower 16% amongst those who are dissatisfied with government's COVID-19 response.

Drop in overall Quality of Life

As noted above, the Quality of Life Index provides a single score, out of 100, that can be used to understand multi-dimensional well-being of respondents. It is made up of 33 variables grouped into seven dimensions: health, socio-economic status, safety, life satisfaction, participation, services, and government satisfaction.

The QoL Survey 6 (2020/21) reveals that there has been a decrease in overall well-being since the last time the survey was run. This is evidenced by growing dissatisfaction with life as a whole over time, and a drop in the QoL Index Score between the 2017/18 and 2020/21 surveys. The QoL Index score for 2020/21 is notably lower than in 2017/18, falling from 64 to 61. This is a return to 2013/14 levels and reverses the gradual upward trend in Index scores over time. This decrease in QoL Index scores was driven by a particularly sharp decline in the government satisfaction dimension, along with smaller decreases in the socio-economic status, life satisfaction and health dimensions.

On average, Black African respondents continue to have the lowest QoL Index scores of all population groups. While QoL Index scores have fallen for all population groups, Black African respondents are the only group to have seen their scores decline below 2013/14 levels.

For the first time since 2013/14, the mean QoL Index score for female respondents is lower than for males. The particular decrease experienced by females relative to 2017/18 supports other indications that females have been more severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than males.

Summary conclusions

The QoL 6 (2020/21) Survey results, especially when considered in comparison to previous QoL survey findings, described the dire social, economic and governance context prior to the July 2022 unrest. Based on the survey results the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. COVID-19 hit a Gauteng City-Region already struggling with a range of challenges to multi-dimensional wellbeing, and has exacerbated many of these challenges.

2. COVID-19 and associated lockdowns have hit hard. The pandemic has unsettled daily routines, and forced households to adapt, including by absorbing additional costs, changing transport and shopping patterns, and having to give more attention to taking care of children and family members.

3. Levels of socio-economic distress are extreme, with many respondents reporting reduction in salaries or working hours, job losses and business closures. Grants and social support have provided some crucial protection to the most vulnerable. However, in general, the most advantaged have been least affected, while African and lower to middle income households have been hit hardest.

4. We see evidence for substantial, and growing psychosocial distress. Personal health, mental health, and levels of social and personal well-being have been knocked.

5. We still see relative stability in delivery of many basic services, and relatively high satisfaction with government's response to COVID-19. But many residents feel let down, even abandoned, by government. Government has clearly not done everything residents expect of it to 'take care' of them. Government satisfaction has been deeply, negatively affected, with a trust deficit being exacerbated by mounting concerns over corruption.

6. The QoL Index highlights decreasing well-being across (nearly) all dimensions, with overall scores pulled down most substantially by the dimensions of governance and socio-economic status. While scores have fallen for all population groups, Africans are the only population group whose scores have fallen below 2013/14 levels. This racial group has consistently had the lowest average quality of life of all population groups since at least 2011, and have experienced by far the slowest increase in average quality of life over time. This inequality has been further exacerbated in the COVID-19 period. Results also show that women (and in particular African women) have, on average, seen a bigger decline in quality

of life than men. This is reflected in the overall QoL Index Score when broken down by sex, and also in a range of specific indicators such as additional child care responsibilities.