

Gaining Ground: The Personal Security Index, 2001

by the Canadian Council on Social Development

Introduction

Information about the economic or physical security of Canadians abounds. While some shows an improvement in conditions, such as a decrease in crime rates, other news is bleak – long waiting lists for surgery, massive layoffs, a lack of safe and affordable housing in our cities. All this information, negative or positive, influences Canadians' perceptions of their personal security.

But what are the facts?

Is the personal security of Canadians improving overall, or is it deteriorating?

To help fill the gap between real trends and perceptions, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), in collaboration with the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Canadian Heritage, EKOS Research Associates Inc., Health Canada, and the National Crime Prevention Centre, with the support of Human Resources Development Canada, has developed the Personal Security Index (PSI).

What is the PSI?

While the concept of personal security can have many dimensions, the PSI is a tool to measure annual changes in the security of Canadians according to three key elements:

- ✓ economic security in the broad sense of job and financial security;
- ✓ health security in the sense of protection against the threats of disease and injury;
- ✓ physical security in the sense of feeling safe from violent crime and theft.

The PSI measures changes in both the numerical trends and in people's perceptions of their personal security. It is a valuable addition to measuring well-being. It is broader than the GDP, and is unique in combining both objective *and* subjective indicators.

The PSI is composed of two indexes: a "Data Index" and a "Perception Index." The Data Index, using many Statistics Canada databases, is designed to measure changes in "real" outcomes related to personal security, such as levels of income and debt, and rates of crime or poor health. The Perception Index is based on responses to a national survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates which asked Canadians how they rated several issues affecting their own personal security. This year's PSI is the third in a series and presents changes between 1998 and 2000. The analytical value of the PSI will build over time as we develop a consistent series of indicators.

Overall Highlights of PSI 2001

⇒ Overall, the personal security of Canadians increased between 1998 and 1999, and according to the latest data available, continued to increase between 1999 and 2000.

⇒ In 2000, Canadians' economic security increased, whether one looks at the hard data or at people's perceptions.

⇒ After a considerable improvement in 1999, the health indicators didn't move much in 2000. People's perceptions of health dropped slightly, while the health data improved slightly.

⇒ Data on physical safety showed some improvement, and people's perceptions of their physical safety increased between 1999 and 2000, but still remained lower than in 1998.

