

## Satisfaction with life in Canada, 1997 and 2000

Long before Gross Domestic Product came to be regarded as the single best measure of a country's well-being, philosophers and theologians looked on happiness as the key factor. Socrates, Marcus Varro, and Augustine, for example, all viewed happiness as the supreme good, and the spirit and soul an integral part of happiness, and they presented many different philosophies of happiness, 288 in Varro alone. (*City of God*, Book 19, Chapter 1). Though there is no accepted measure of happiness, one could argue that the level of satisfaction of a people with life would be one way of measuring happiness, at least if such perceptions could be reliably measured.

In the years 1997 and 2000 Statistics Canada asked Canadians "How satisfied are you with your life in general?" in its *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*. This survey had a sample size of over 18,000 in 1997 and over 14,000 in 2000. The only noteworthy difference in the response to the question for the two years is the higher percentage of respondents not answering the question in 2000, though the refusal rate is still low, 6% in 2000, and 2% in 1997. The basic similarities in the patterns of responses to this question suggest that this survey source is yielding reliable information in answer to a question of fundamental importance. In this note the relationship between life satisfaction and some other variables is explored, especially marital status and religious commitment.

Of those reporting their level of satisfaction with life, the vast majority say they are either very or somewhat satisfied with their life. Overall, just over ten million Canadians (aged 15 and over, living in households in the ten provinces) said they were "very satisfied" in both years, about 42% of the population each year. Another 11 million in each year, 48% in 1997, and 45% in 2000, said they were "somewhat satisfied"; about 48% of the responding population in both years. The satisfied population therefore totaled 90% in 1997 and 87% in 2000, or 92% of the responding population in both years. Only 6% to 7% of Canadians in both years said they were "somewhat dissatisfied" with life in general, while only one to two percent said they were "very dissatisfied". In total those dissatisfied with their life equaled 1.9 million in 1997 and 1.7 million in 2000.

The rest of this note comments on differences between subgroups of Canadians among those reporting their level of satisfaction with life. About equal percentages of men and women were very satisfied with their life in 1997, 43% to 44%, and men and women were quite similar in 2000 as well, 43% of men and 46% of women. Similarly, the percentages of men and women saying they were somewhat satisfied with their lives is similar, 48% and 49% in 1997, and 50% (men) and 46% in 2000. Life satisfaction does not appear to vary much by age group. In both years the seniors aged 65 and over were most inclined to say they

were very satisfied with life, 50%, while those in the next lower age bracket were least inclined, 46%. These differences are not great, however, and no simple pattern in life satisfaction with age is discernable (though a relationship is found in the analyses described at the end of this note).

Clear differences, however, are to be seen in life satisfaction according to marital status, and the patterns are similar in 1997 and 2000. The married/common law population is most likely to say they are very satisfied with their life, 48% in both years, followed by the single (never married) population, 40% to 41%, the widowed population, 35 to 37%, and the separated or divorced population, 25% in 1997 and 32% in 2000. For the year 2000 it is possible to get separate estimates for the married and common-law population, and the differences are large. Some 50% of the married population say they are very satisfied with life, compared with only 38% of the common-law population. It is also possible in 2000 to get separate estimates for the separated and divorced populations, and again the differences are noteworthy. Divorced men and women are more inclined to say they are very satisfied with life, 35%, than the separated men and women, 27%. The trauma and life readjustment associated with separation would probably account for at least some of this difference. Some differences between the sexes are evident – married women are somewhat more inclined than married men to say they are very satisfied with life (53% versus 48%), widows are more inclined than widowers to say they are very satisfied (38% versus 32%), while divorced men are more inclined than divorced women to say they are very satisfied with life (39% versus 33%).

No matter what the marital status, it is expected that religious commitment is associated with higher life satisfaction, providing not only a sense of community and support, but also purpose and meaning. Married (plus common-law), single, widowed and separated or divorced populations are therefore examined according to their religious affiliation and frequency of attendance at religious services. The samples for 1997 and 2000 are pooled for this investigation in order to increase the reliability of the estimates.

Married men and women are most likely to say they are very satisfied with life if they are Baptist, United, or affiliated with a smaller Christian faith (58% to 60%), and least likely if they are French Roman Catholic or non-Christian (38% and 36%, respectively). Married non-French Catholics are almost as likely as all married persons in Canada to say they are very satisfied, 49%, while Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Pentecostals are above the Canadian average, 53% to 56%. Non-religious married persons who were affiliated with a religious group when young (the *no religion now* group) are also more likely than average to be satisfied with their life (55%), while the non-religious who did not have a religious association when young (the *no religion ever* group) are less likely than average to be very satisfied with life (45%). For the married population satisfaction with life increases with the frequency of church attendance. Those attending weekly are most inclined to be very satisfied with life, 56%, while those

attending just once or twice a year or not at all are least inclined to be very satisfied, 44% to 46%. This tendency is to be observed for both married men and women.

The single population exhibits some patterns that are similar to those of the married population and some that are different. Single Presbyterians, are the most likely of all identified faith groups to be very satisfied with life, 55%, though United, Lutheran and Pentecostal singles are not far behind, 49 to 52%. French Catholic and non-Christian singles are least likely to be very satisfied, 33% and 35%, respectively. Those affiliated with the smaller Christian faiths, non-French Catholics and no religion groups, are also on the low side with 40% to 42% very satisfied with life. Singles who attend church at least weekly or monthly are more inclined to be satisfied with life (50% and 48%) than singles who attend less frequently or not at all (36% to 38%) – this is true for both single men and women.

Among the widowed population, satisfaction with life is highest in the Presbyterian, Lutheran and Baptist communities (52% to 53% are very satisfied), and lowest in the Catholic and no religion ever communities (29% to 33%). Those with no religion now are much more likely to be very satisfied with life than their counterparts with no religion ever (44% versus 29%). The widowed population that attends church weekly is much more likely to be satisfied with their life than are their counterparts who attend less often or not at all (45% versus 29% to 34%), and this result holds for both widows and widowers.

Finally, the separated and divorced population is seen to vary widely in terms of their likelihood of being very satisfied with their life. Lutherans are most likely to be satisfied, 45%, followed by the smaller Christian faiths, Presbyterians, and the no religion now group (35% to 39%). Separated French Catholics, Baptists and the no religion ever groups are least likely to be very satisfied. As usual, those attending religious services weekly are more inclined to be very satisfied with life than those attending monthly or less often (39% versus 34% and 25% to 26%). Among separated and divorced men, some 44% of the weekly and monthly attenders are very satisfied with their life, compared with 25% to 29% of their counterparts who attend religious services less often or not at all. The difference is not as great among separated and divorced women: 37% of the weekly attenders are very satisfied, compared with 29% of monthly attenders, and 24% to 26% of those attending less often or not at all.

An analysis was conducted in order to detect significant (not arising from chance) associations with the level of satisfaction reported by both men and women. In the analysis of men, life satisfaction is higher for non-French Catholics, liberal Protestants (United Church affiliates, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Lutherans) and conservative Christians (Baptist, Pentecostal and smaller Christian faiths) than the non-religious population, while satisfaction is lower among French Catholics and non-Christians than the non-religious population.

Also, satisfaction declines with age, and is higher for married than single men or widowers, and lower for separated or divorced men than single men. Satisfaction is lower among Quebec men than those in either Ontario, the Prairie region or British Columbia, and lower in the year 2000 than in 1997. In these analyses the estimates of association between any two factors hold, given the effect of the other factors in the analysis.

In the analysis of women, life satisfaction is again higher for non-French Catholics, liberal Protestants and conservative Christians than the non-religious population, though satisfaction is no different among French Catholics and non-Christians when compared with the non-religious population. As in the case of men, satisfaction declines with age, and is higher for married than single women or widows, and lower for separated or divorced women than single women. Satisfaction is also lower among Quebec women than those in either Ontario, the Prairie region or British Columbia, and lower in the year 2000 than in 1997.

In summary, this analysis of satisfaction with life in Canada has found marked variation according to marital status and religious commitment, and has identified some other important factors as well. The married/common law population is found to be most satisfied with their life, especially the married group, and the separated/divorced population the least satisfied, especially the separated population. Satisfaction is found to vary by religious commitment, both faith affiliation and the frequency of attendance at religious services, for the married/common law, singles, widows and widowers, and the separated/divorced populations – satisfaction is higher for the regular attenders and members of the Christian faiths except French Catholic, when compared with either non-Christians or the non-religious. Analysis reveals satisfaction to be lower in Quebec than in regions west of Quebec, following control for other factors. Several other factors might be expected to be related to life satisfaction (income, health status, education, and labour force status, for example) and could easily be explored in future studies using this data source.

Supporting tables, charts and an appendix follow.

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The author alone is responsible for any errors or omissions.*

**Table 1. How satisfied are you with your life in general?  
Population aged 15+ in 1997 and 2000**

	1997 (number)	2000	Growth	1997 (percentage)	2000	1997 (percentage reporting)	2000
Total	23,808,151	24,383,206	575,055	100.0	100.0		
Very satisfied	10,123,472	10,235,771	112,299	42.5	42.0	43.4	44.7
Somewhat satisfied	11,320,419	10,913,334	-407,085	47.5	44.8	48.5	47.7
Somewhat dissatisfied	1,588,214	1,358,743	-229,471	6.7	5.6	6.8	5.9
Very dissatisfied	286,589	370,240	83,651	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.6
Don't know	51,188	119,785	68,597	0.2	0.5		
Refused/not stated	438,269	1,385,333	947,064	1.8	5.7		
Total reporting	23,318,694	22,878,088	-440,606	97.9	93.8	100.0	100.0

**Table 2. How satisfied are you with your life in general?  
Percentages of men and women, 1997 and 2000**

	1997	2000		1997	2000
<i>Very satisfied</i>			<i>Somewhat satisfied</i>		
men	44	43	men	48	50
women	43	46	women	49	46
total	43	45	total	49	48

**Table 3. How satisfied are you with your life in general?  
Percentages by marital status, 1997 and 2000**

	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Total satisfied (%)
<b>1997</b>			
married	48	46	94
single	40	51	90
widowed	35	55	90
separated/divorced	25	53	78
<b>2000</b>			
married	48	46	94
single	41	50	90
widowed	37	54	91
separated/divorced	32	54	86

Source: Statistics Canada's 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

**Table 4. How satisfied are you with your life in general?  
Percentages by detailed marital status, 2000**

	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Total satisfied (%)
Married	50	44	94
Common-law	38	56	94
Widowed	37	54	91
Separated	27	57	84
Divorced	35	52	87
Single	41	50	90

**Table 5. How satisfied are you with your life in general? Percentages for the  
married/common law population, by faith community, 1997 to 2000 averages**

	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Total satisfied (%)
French Catholic	38	59	96
Non-French Catholic	49	45	94
United Church	58	37	95
Anglican	56	40	96
Presbyterian	56	37	93
Lutheran	56	37	93
Baptist	59	32	91
Pentecostal	53	39	93
Smaller Christian faiths	60	36	96
Non-Christian	36	56	93
No religion now	55	38	93
No religion ever	45	49	93

**Table 6. How satisfied are you with your life in general? Percentages for the  
single (never married) population, by faith community, 1997 to 2000 averages**

	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Total satisfied (%)
French Catholic	33	59	91
Non-French Catholic	42	49	92
United Church	52	43	95
Anglican	36	58	94
Presbyterian	55	27	83
Lutheran	49	46	95
Baptist	46	49	96
Pentecostal	49	42	91
Smaller Christian faiths	41	47	88
Non-Christian	35	51	86
No religion now	41	45	86
No religion ever	40	49	89

**Table 7. How satisfied are you with your life in general? Percentages for the widowed population, by faith community, 1997 to 2000 averages**

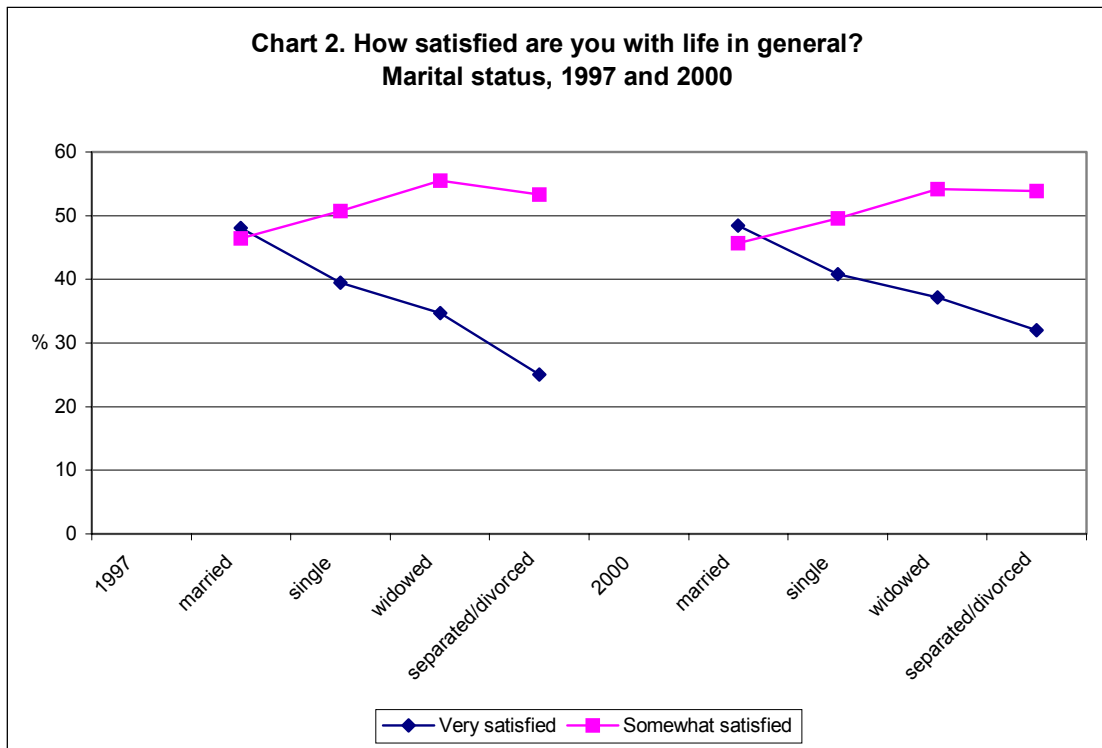
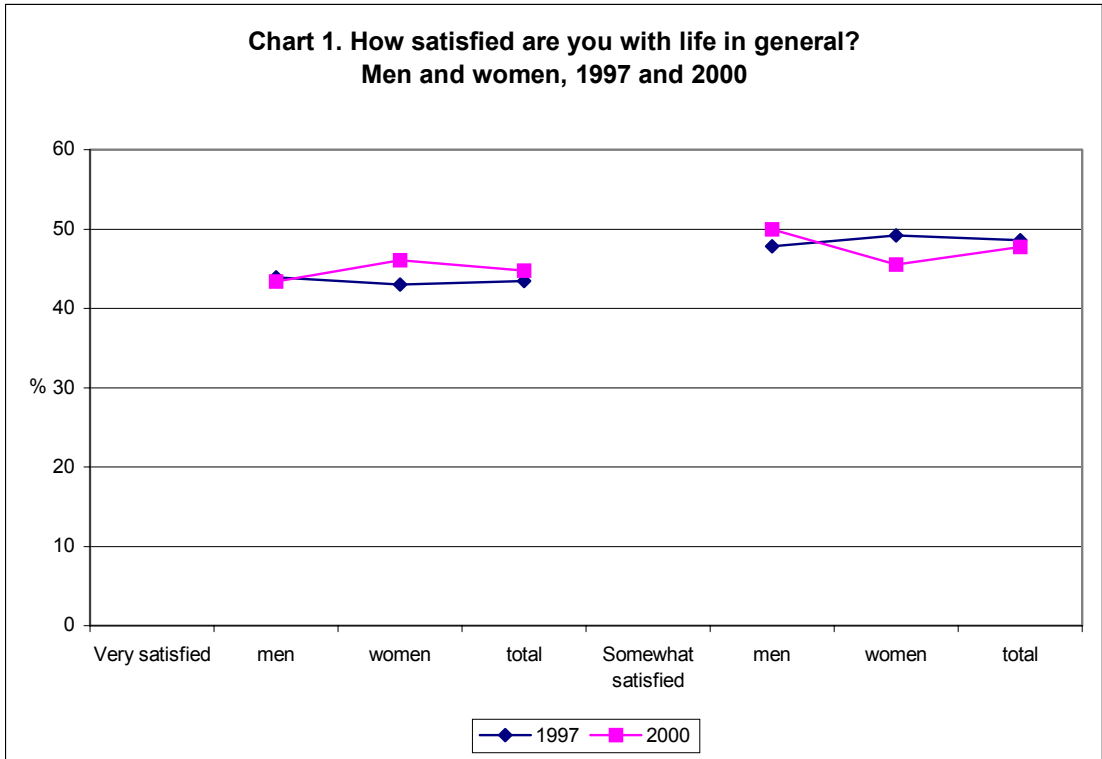
	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Total satisfied (%)
French Catholic	29	62	91
Other Catholic	33	59	92
Non-French Catholic	43	52	95
Anglican	42	47	88
Presbyterian	53	40	94
Lutheran	52	34	86
Baptist	53	42	95
Smaller Christian faiths	46	43	90
No religion now	44	40	85
No religion ever	29	58	87

**Table 8. How satisfied are you with your life in general? Percentages for the separated/divorced population, by faith community, 1997 to 2000 averages**

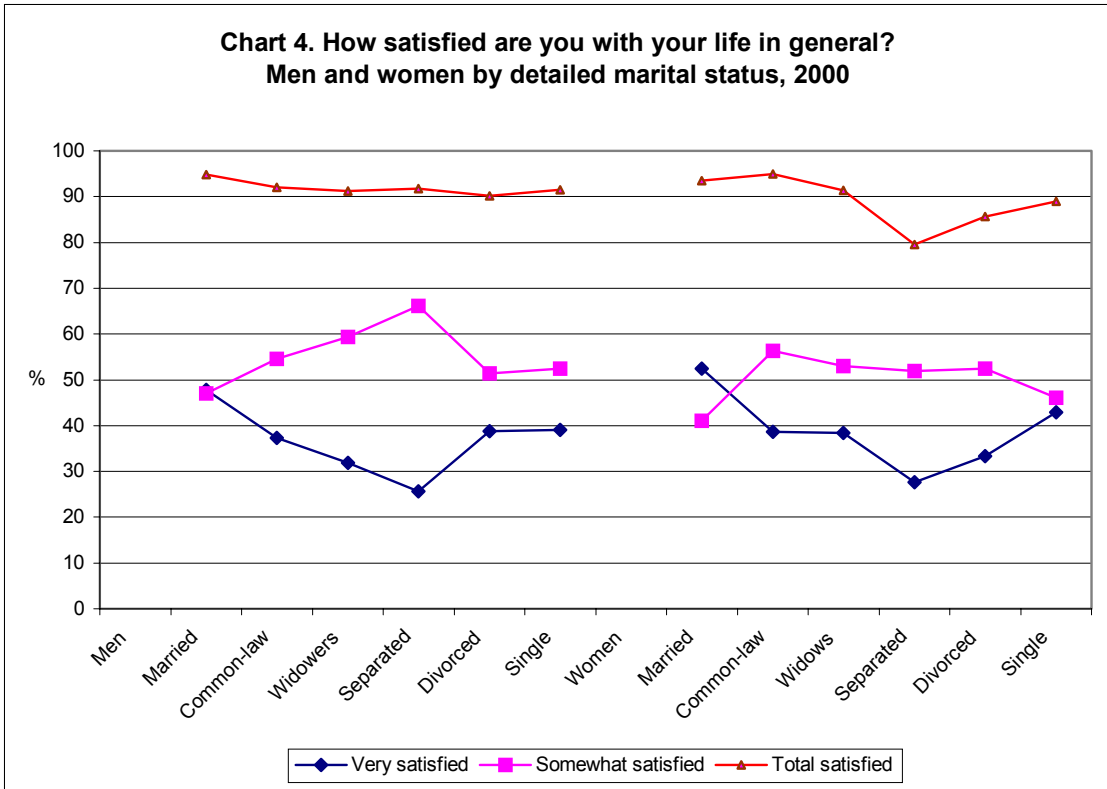
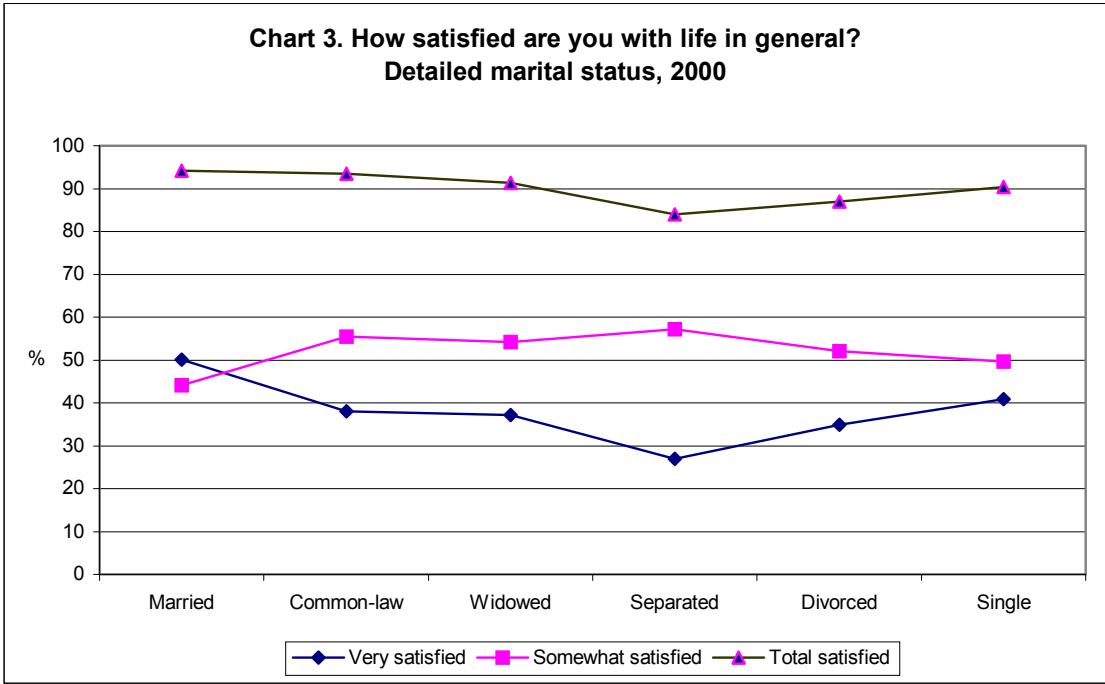
	Very satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Total satisfied (%)
French Catholic	20	61	81
Non-French Catholic	31	50	81
United Church	32	55	87
Anglican	34	54	88
Presbyterian	35	49	84
Lutheran	45	45	90
Baptist	21	62	83
Pentecostal	...	...	87
Smaller Christian faiths	39	48	87
Non-Christian	29	...	82
No religion now	36	45	81
No religion ever	23	54	78

...= sample less than 30 respondents reporting the characteristic.

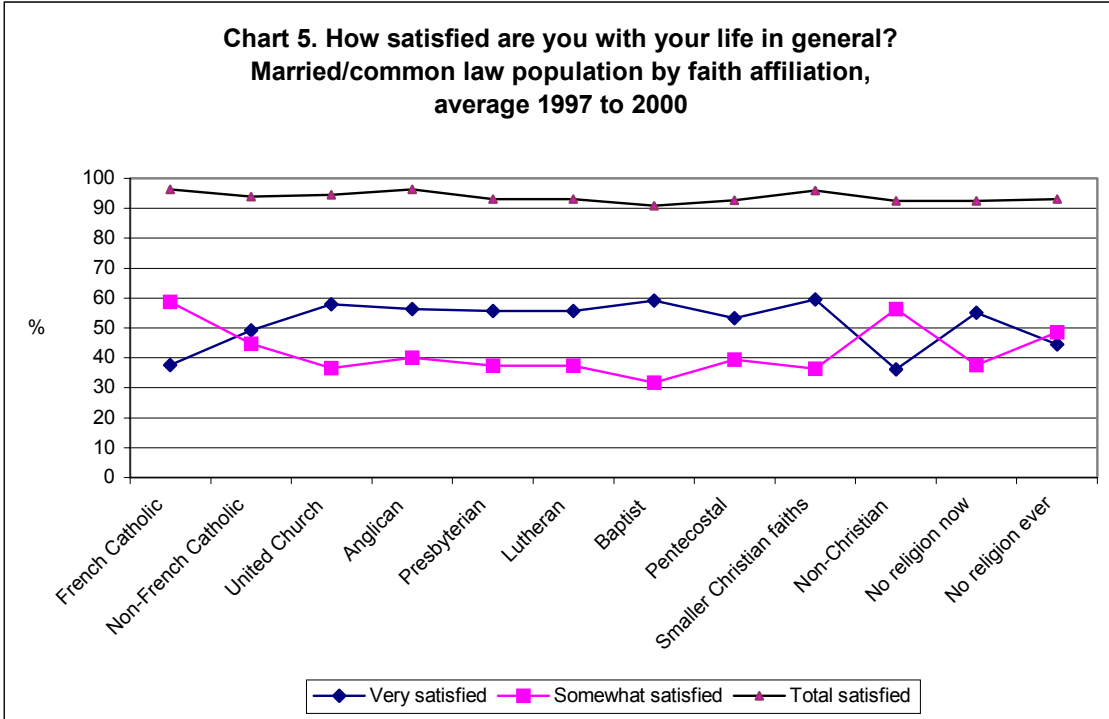
Source: Statistics Canada's 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.



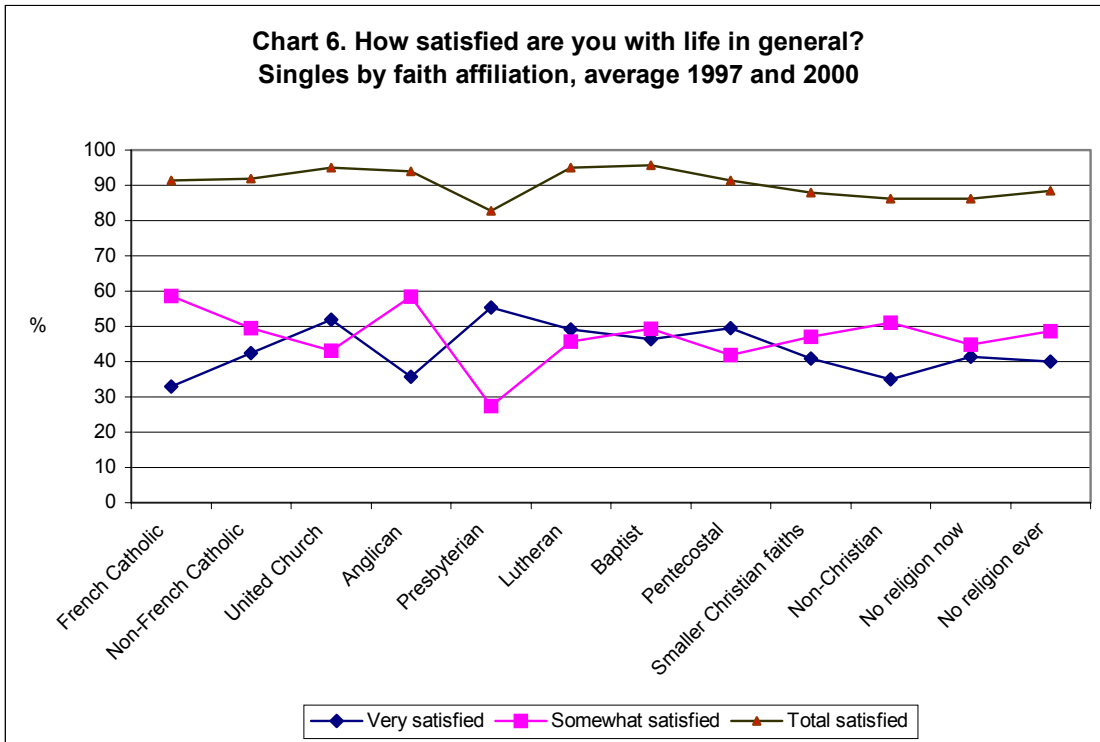
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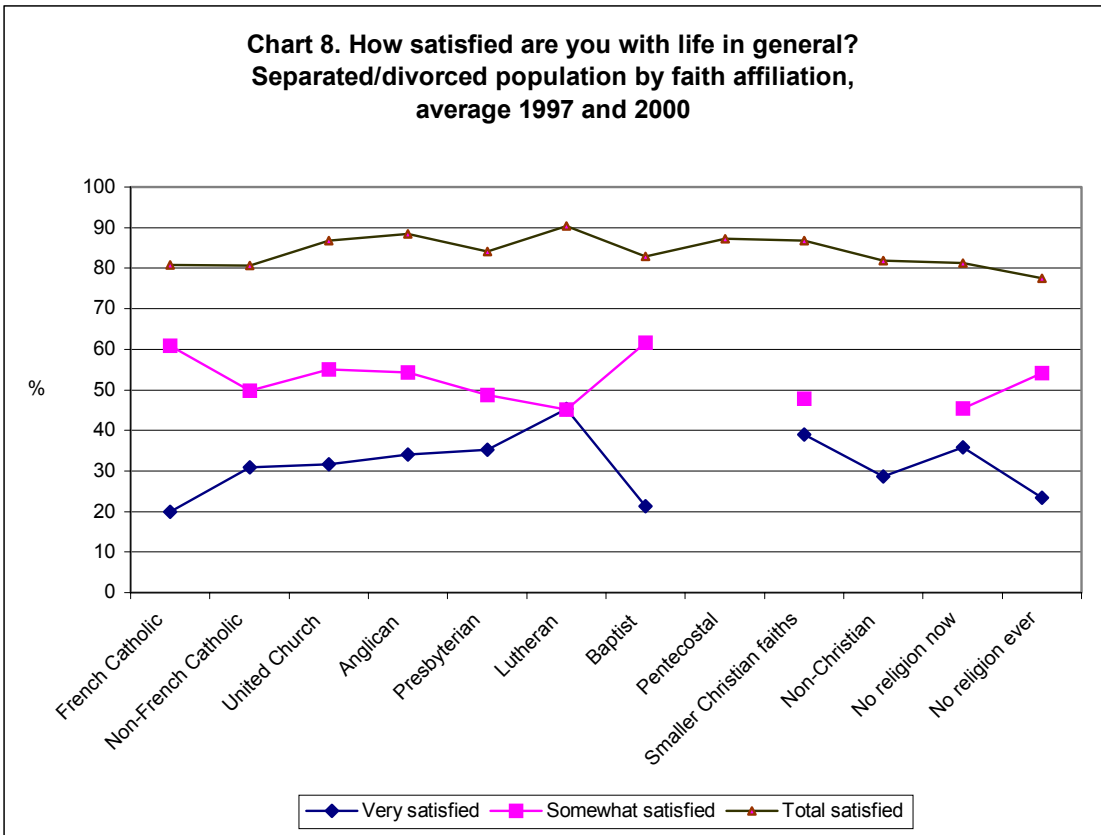
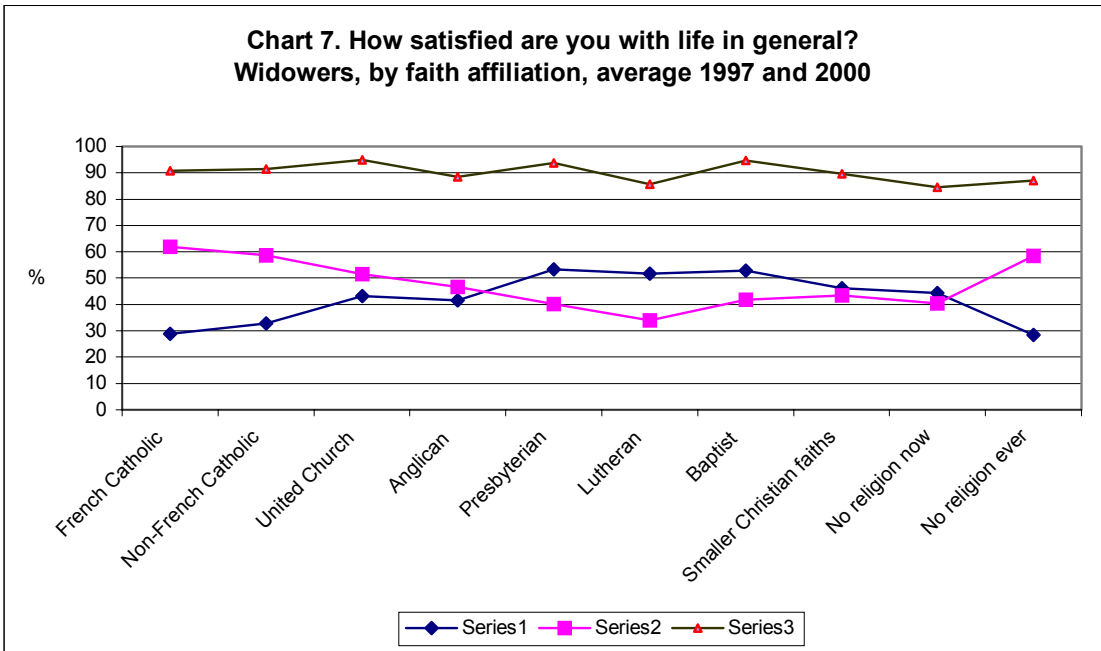


**Chart 5. How satisfied are you with your life in general?  
Married/common law population by faith affiliation,  
average 1997 to 2000**



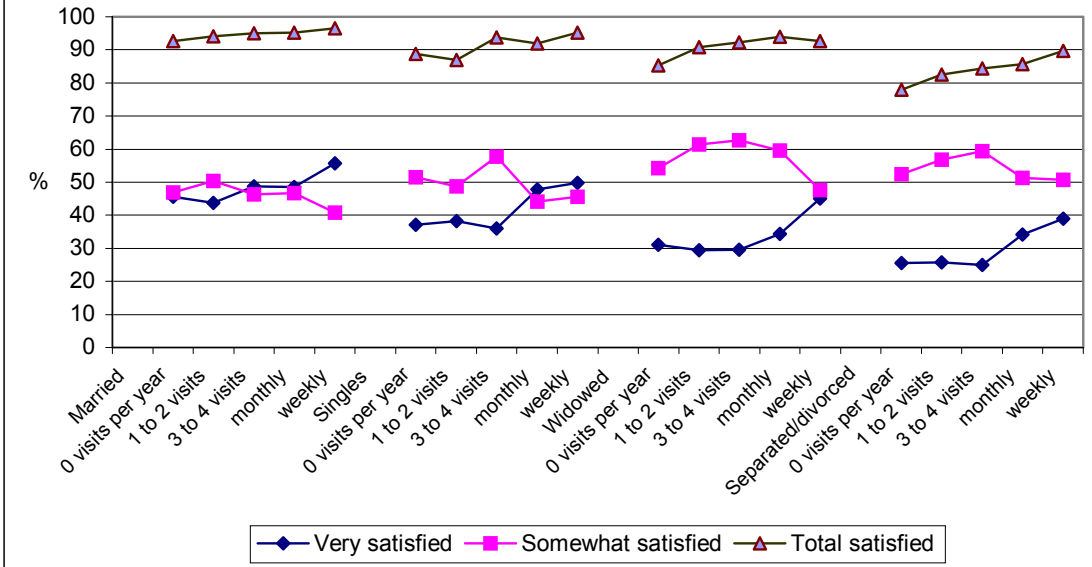
**Chart 6. How satisfied are you with life in general?  
Singles by faith affiliation, average 1997 and 2000**



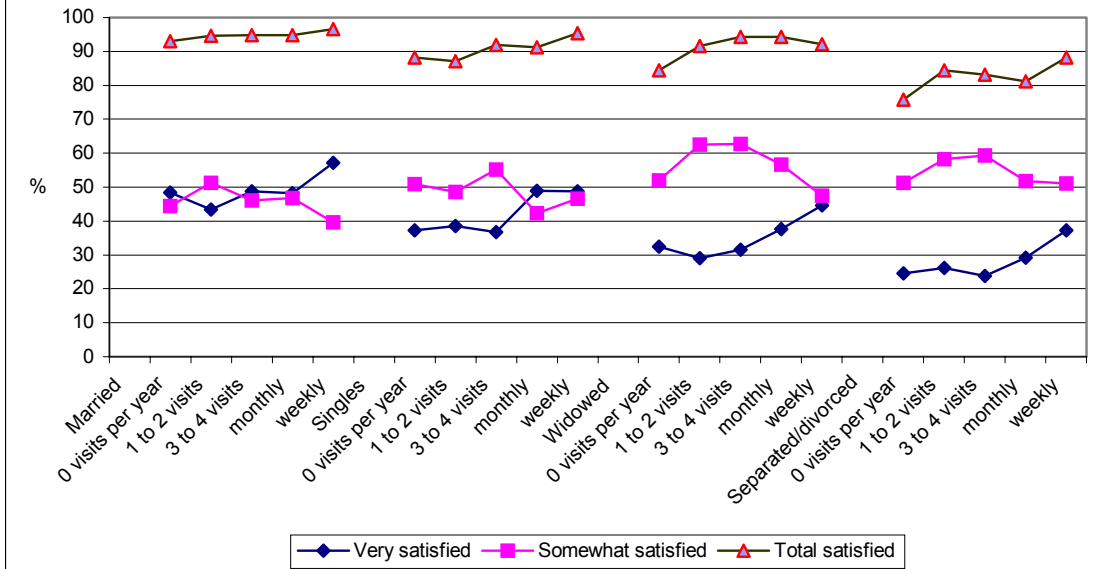


Source: Statistics Canada's 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

**Chart 9. How satisfied are you with life in general?  
Frequency of attendance at religious services, by marital status,  
average 1997 and 2000**

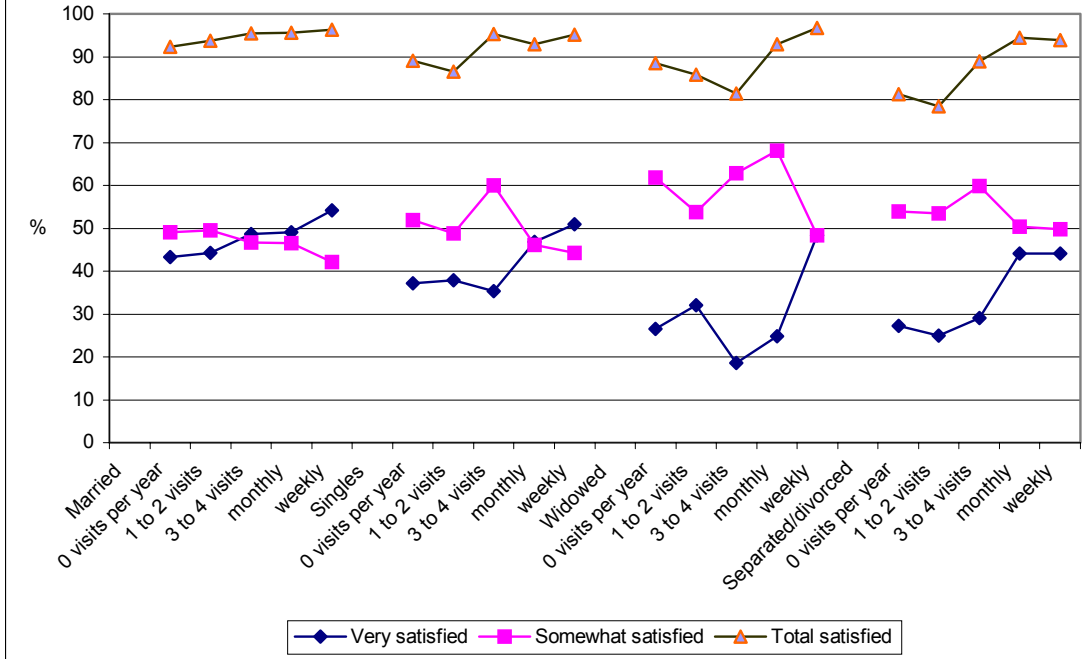


**Chart 10. How satisfied are you with life in general?  
Frequency of attendance at religious services,  
and marital status of women, average 1997 to 2000**



Source: Statistics Canada's 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

**Chart 11. How satisfied are you with life in general?  
Frequency of attendance at religious services  
and marital status of men, average 1997 to 2000**



Source: Statistics Canada's 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

**Appendix 1. Predictions of level of satisfaction with life in general, reported by men and women, Canada, 1997 to 2000.**

(regression estimates)	Men r bar squared=0.028; n = 13,843			Women r bar squared=0.044; n = 18,167		
	B	t statistic	significance	B	t statistic	significance
Constant	35.743	3.2	0.001	31.397	3.0	0.003
French Catholic	0.031	1.2	0.245	0.054	2.2	0.027
Non-French Catholic	0.077	3.5	0.000	0.074	3.6	0.000
Liberal Protestant	0.157	6.2	0.000	0.118	5.5	0.000
Conservative Christian	0.171	5.7	0.000	0.106	4.1	0.000
Non-Christian	-0.199	-4.9	0.000	0.041	1.1	0.268
Age (natural log)	-0.096	-5.6	0.000	-0.116	-7.9	0.000
Married or common-law	0.152	9.5	0.000	0.202	14.1	0.000
Separated or divorced	-0.115	-3.9	0.000	-0.175	-8.2	0.000
Widower/widow	-0.021	-0.5	0.634	0.083	3.4	0.001
Atlantic Canada	-0.001	0.0	0.966	0.039	1.8	0.078
Quebec	-0.097	-4.7	0.000	-0.105	-5.7	0.000
Ontario	0.012	0.7	0.515	0.031	2.0	0.051
Prairie Provinces	0.037	1.8	0.072	-0.001	-0.1	0.944
Year	-0.016	-2.9	0.004	-0.014	-2.6	0.008

**Notes:**

1. The reference groups of the predictor variables are, for religion, no religious affiliation; for marital status, single/never married, and for region, British Columbia.
2. Liberal Protestant = United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian and Lutheran; Conservative Christian = Baptist, Pentecostal, and smaller Christian faiths.
3. Estimates are based on weighted regression where the weight equals the respondent weight, divided by the sum of the respondent weights. No account is taken of the clustering of the sample, which is non-random. The standard errors are thus under-estimated, and the levels of significance are over-estimated; as a result, only results with high levels of significance, say 0.01, should be regarded as significant.
4. The level of satisfaction with life = 1 if very dissatisfied, 2 if somewhat dissatisfied, 3 if somewhat satisfied, and 4 if very satisfied.
5. Estimates are intended to identify statistically significant correlations, and not to model actual behaviour.

Source: Statistics Canada's 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.