

# A Sociological Analysis of Life Conditions within Kurdish Society: Kurdish People's Quality of Life (1998-2013)

Analîzeke Sosyolojîk li ser Şertên Jiyânê di Nava Civaka Kurdan de: Qelîteya Jiyânê ya Kurdan (1998-2013)

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## ABSTRACT:

Quality of life research nowadays has become an important discipline within the social science and humanities. It has developed itself out of the social indicators movement as a tool of social reporting or socio-economic evaluation of people's life conditions. Advancements in the field accelerated the research diversification in a way that today we encounter very much cutting-edge, professional subfields of quality of life, and many leading scientists within the discipline. Alex C. Michalos, Ed Diener, Heinz Herbert Noll, Ruut Venhoven, Richard Easterlin and Wolfgang Schulz are only a few names within hundreds of scientists who contributed to the discipline and its advancement to recognize important indicators of humankind's well-being and quality of life. Combinative model of Wolfgang Schulz has been used to evaluate the quality of life of Kurdish populations around the world and this article has tried to summarize some findings of those researches.

**Keywords:** Quality of life, subjective quality of life, life satisfaction, Kurdish population in Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan region, Kurdish immigration around world.

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## PUXTE:

Di van salên dawiyê de di qadên zanistên civakî û mirovî de lêkolînên li ser qelîteya jiyânê bûne disîplîneke girîng. Ev disîplîn di nav tevgera nîşaneyên civakî de wek ragihaner yan jî wek helsegîna mercên jiyana

mirovan derketiye pêş. Ji bo nirxandina qelîteya jiyana nifûsa Kurd li derdora dinyayê rêbaza têkel (combinative model) ya Wolfgang Schulz hatiye bikaranîn û ev gotare hewl dide ku hin encamên van lêkolînan bi awayekî kurt vebêje.

Pêşveçûnên di vê qadê de lêkolînên ciyawaz derdixe holê, îro em pêrgî gelek nêrînên nû û bin-qadên qelîteya jiyane û gelek zanistên sereke di vê disîplîne de tên. Alex C. Michalos, Ed Diener, Heinz Herbert Noll, Ruut Veenhoven, Richard Easterlin and Wolfgang Schulz tenê çend nav in ji nava bi sedan zanistên di vê disîplîne ne yê ku serzêdekirin li disîplîne û pêşveçûn li ser danasîna nîşaneyên kamranî û qelîteya jiyane ya mirovahiyê kirin.

**Peyvên sereke:** qelîteya jiyane, qelîteya sûbjektîf a jiyane, tetmîna jiyane, nifûsa Kurd li Îranê, herêma Kurdistanê Îraqê, koçerên Kurd li derdora dinyayê.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Quality of Life research has developed itself into a multidisciplinary field of applied sociology. It cannot be seen anymore as just a subordination of social indicators movement of the last half a century. Quality of Life research has become a fundamental technique of peoples' life evaluation within different, but still interrelated science of sociology, psychology, economy, social policy and welfare systems, as well as social work and social planning. The field has diversified itself further in recent decades and has evolved into a standalone field within the social science family. It has led to erecting bridges between the field and the health / medical science, as well as the industrial development and globalization. Nowadays, many scientists are concerned about the effects of the globalized world on people's quality of life and well-being or the effects of the industrialization and expansion of technology or nanotechnology on communities' well-being. Advancements in the field accelerated the research diversification in a way, that today we encounter some cutting-edge, professional subfields of quality of life, and many leading scientists within the discipline. Alex C. Michalos is a leading Quality of Life scientist, who has gathered huge international data on Social Indicators of Quality of Life. His 1500 pages report on comparison between the Quality of Life indicators of US and Canada, added tremendously to the discipline's development. The world ranking psychologist, Ed Diener today counts as the forerunner of the Happiness research one of the foundations of Subjective Quality of Life measures. He believes that a real analysis of well-being and Quality of Life is not possible without proper evaluation and understanding of people's happiness level. Ruut Veenhoven, a professor of social conditions of human happiness at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, also helped greatly to develop the field further and is still leading researches on the main elements of happiness and subjective quality of life. Richard Easterlin, a professor

in economic and quality of life research and economic demography, has extensive studies on the relationship between economic and financial factors and happiness level or well-being of humankind. His theory on the effects of the economic growth on happiness and subjective quality of life in a form, that no economic growth alone could have a longer run increase in the level of quality of life or happiness, has led to a series of contradictory analysis and arguments.<sup>1</sup>

A valid and scientifically appropriate evaluation of Quality of Life is merely achievable, when an approach triangulation and theory diversification is incorporated in the analysis process. In this regards, Wolfgang Zapf has been using a combination of subjective and objective indicators to better evaluate the people's living conditions or well-being, in which, one's life could be categorized from a very low living condition i. e. "deprivation" (combination of bad objective and negative subjective indicators) to a higher life level i. e. "well-being" (existence of both good objective and positive subjective indicators). Incorporating the material life indicators in the analysis will furnish the objective quality of life index; while non-material indicators provide subjective quality of life index. Wolfgang Schulz (1985), at the University of Vienna has incorporated psychosomatic indicators: "*general life satisfaction*", "*general happiness*" and "*material life satisfaction*" into a combinative index of "Subjective Quality of Life". This model later on is being used to evaluate the quality of life of Kurdish populations around the world (Schulz W. et al. 1985).

Apart from which elements we are going to incorporate in our subjective quality of life analysis, there are two main approaches, nowadays recognized in this field: Top-Down-Model and Bottom-Up-Model, in which the first one (Top-Down-Model), by measuring the global / overall subjective quality of life, is trying to provide some assessments of important effective domains. Conversely, the second model (Bottom-Up-Model) assumes, that a measurement of the global and overall subjective quality of life is best possible by assessing its different elements or social domains like quality of employment's life, income, health, dwelling, education, leisure, environment, etc. Although, both these models have accordingly reached some level of success in analyzing the population's quality of life, but what best features here, is normally to consider a combination model of these approaches. The only consideration here might be the incorporating a huge number of mostly meager indicators into the model, which would make the obtaining of scientific result very difficult or it will even make the research process at the stage of data-gathering or interview very long and exhausting.

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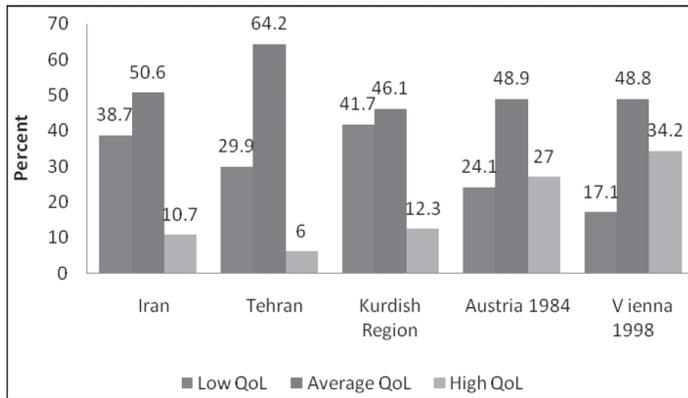
1 Ruut Veenhoven and Floris Verguns, in a coauthored article (the Esterlin Illusion) claim that an increase in the GDP and economic growth will affect further increase in people's happiness and this contradicts Richard Easterlin's assertion in this regard.

## 2. AN ANALYSIS OF QUALITY OF LIFE OF KURDISH POPULATION

Although, the first academic studies on the Quality of Life started almost 40 years ago in United States and Europe, but it hasn't found its stronghold within the social sciences or practical research in developing countries including the Kurdish society yet. Analysis of Quality of Life in Kurdistan or within the Kurdish population may have indirectly been discussed in some research or academic writings, but it has never been considered for a holistic scientific regard. Mainly, the small scale research projects conducted in these countries were either focusing on specific target groups, which is the usual concern in the health related quality of life analysis, or it incorporates just some objective indicators, which cannot explain the overall quality of life of the population ever.

Maybe the first practice in applied sociological analysis of people's life conditions within the Kurdish population has been a field research at the University of Vienna in 1998-99 (Rahmani 1999), in which the subjective quality of life of Kurdish and Non-Kurdish population has been measured and compared. In this research, the author has tried for the first time to evaluate both objective and subjective quality of life of Kurdish urban population in Iran. Here, subjective quality of life has been evaluated at a general as well as domain levels. The subjective quality of life in this research is built on a combination of three psychosomatic variables: "General Life Satisfaction", "Happiness" and "Material Life Satisfaction". The KMO test (Measure of sampling adequacy) has shown a satisfactory value of 0.65, while the Cronbach's Alpha (coefficient of internal consistency) has shown here a higher positive value of 0.80, which means the three selected variables are in a great internal consistency. This research shows, that over 90 percent of the Iranians in 1999 have been suffering from a very low or low to an average subjective quality of life, out of which 40 percent show a very low quality of life. This indicates a catastrophic level of well-being for the whole country in this year. There is a huge disparity between the level of life between the agglomeration Tehran and the urban Kurdish region of the country. Less than 42 percent of the Kurdish urban settlers of Iran show a low subjective quality of life, while the same indicator for the agglomeration of Tehran is about 30 percent. Also, the percentage of the people with highest subjective quality of life in Kurdish region is only about 2 percent, while in Tehran, it goes beyond 6 percent mark. From the total 272 interviews in this year, 11 people indicated of having the lowest level of subjective quality of life, which all fell within the Kurdish urban region and none of them emerged in the agglomeration of Tehran. A comparison of these findings with ones of similar researches for the

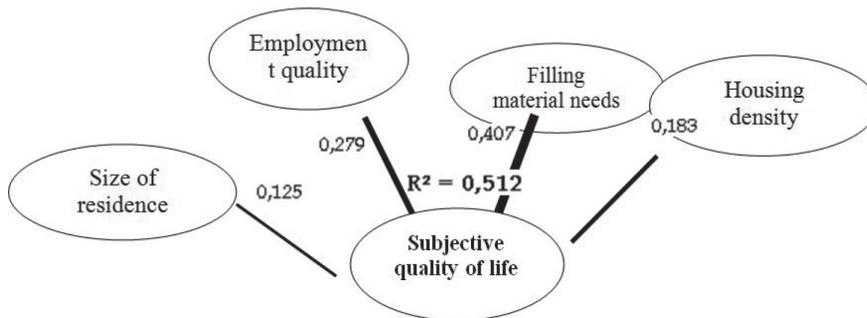
city of Vienna (1998) and Austria (1984), conducted by Wolfgang Schulz, shows a huge disparity between the demographic groups. The data show that Viennese have comparatively enjoyed a better subjective quality of life than others and Kurdish urban population of Iran has suffered most for its high percentage of low subjective quality of life (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Comparison of Subjective Quality of Life for different areas

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani (1999)

Findings of this study on the quality of life of Kurdish and Non-Kurdish urban population in Iran show that four main life domains, like “*fulfillment of material needs*”, “*job quality*”, “*residence size*” and “*housing density*” are fundamentally affecting the level of subjective quality of life. These four life domains, together account for over 50 percent of the variance within the subjective quality of life, it means, there is still room for some other important elements such as political or socio-economic factors to get involved into this equation (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Relationship between subjective quality of life and some important impact factors (social domains) in urban population of Iran, 1999

A gender distribution of the findings show that the female population, although suffers from a low subjective quality of life in both Kurdish and Non-Kurdish regions of Iran, but it has a slightly better condition than the male population. The findings show that one third (33. 3%) of the female population in Kurdish urban area suffers from a low subjective quality of life while almost half of the male population (49. 5%), indicate a low quality of life. The condition in the agglomeration of Tehran is much better: 22. 2 percent of the female population and 35 percent of males show a low subjective quality of life.

Findings of a 2011 research<sup>2</sup> on the Kurdish immigrants and refugees to Canada show a relative higher and better subjective quality of life. In contrast to the findings of the comparable research project of 1999 for Kurdish and Non-Kurdish Iranian population, in which 90 percent of population indicated of having a very low or low to average subjective quality of life, this research gives a relative better living condition data for the Kurdish immigrants in Canada. Accordingly, two third of the population show a high to average subjective quality of life, from which close to 23 percent show a high subjective quality of life. People with low subjective quality of life tend to be more than 37 percent mark (Table 1).

Level	Frequency	Percent
High	76	22. 77
Average	80	39. 60
Low	46	37. 62
Total	215	100

**Table 1: Subjective Quality of Life within the Kurdish immigrants of Canada 2011**

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani, unpublished field research in 2011, Toronto

Comparing the findings of the same research with the ones calculated for Austrians in 1984 or for the city of Vienna in 1998, indicates a better, but still low subjective quality of life for the Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Canada in 2011. In other words, Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Canada show a much better rate in subjective quality of life and well-being than the whole Iranian population or the Kurdish urban population, but still lower than the one of Austrian or Viennese population. While 34. 2 percent of Viennese in 1998 and only 27 percent of Austrians in 1984 show a high subjective quality of life, close to 23 percent

2 This research is directed by the author as a community based research conducted at Kurdish House in Toronto on 2011 and all the data are available in a SPSS file format.

of the Kurdish immigrants and refugees of Canada have shown a high subjective quality of life in 2011.

Distribution of subjective quality of life index by countries of origin within the Canadian-Kurdish immigrants and refugees in 2011 shows, that those Kurds, who originate from Iraq and Iran, have much higher rates of low subjective quality of life, and a relative higher level in the average subjective quality of life. The Kurds from Turkey show to have a relative equally distributed rates; it means people with low, high or average subjective quality of life are the same size. Although Kurds from Iran show a bigger share in high Subjective Quality of Life, but they also, controversially indicate a relative higher percentage of the low Subjective Quality of Life (Figure 3).

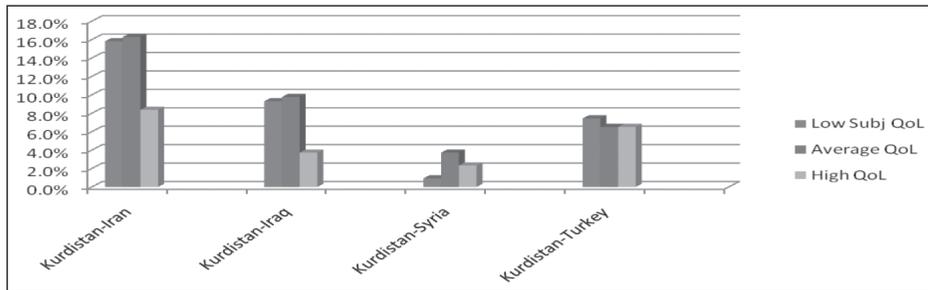


Figure 3: Subjective Quality of Life within Kurdish community of Canada, 2011

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani (2011)

By incorporating the “Happiness” variable into our analysis, we would realize that the Kurdish immigrants of Canada are better off than their level of Subjective Quality of Life. In average, there are more people that are happier than having a high Subjective Quality of Life. While the number of “very unhappy” and “unhappy” people within the Kurdish Canadians is extremely lower for all four parts of the Kurdistan regions, the number of Kurdish people who are “very happy” or “happy” is remarkable in all parts of Kurdistan (Figure 4).

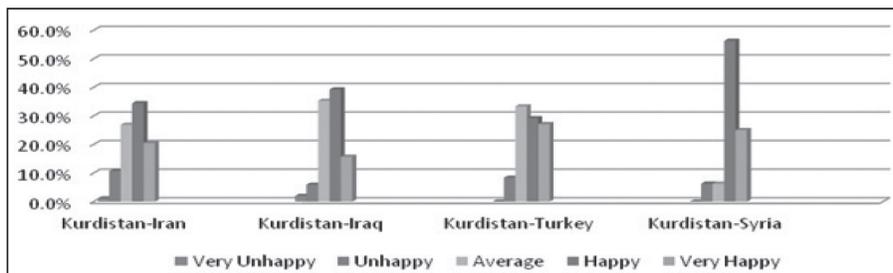
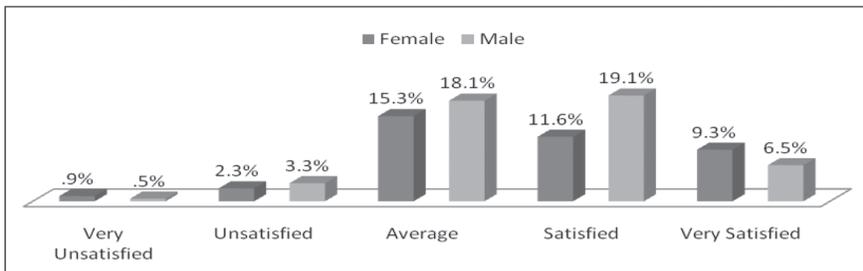


Figure 4: Happiness level within Kurdish immigrants of Canada, 2011

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani, unpublished field research 2011, Toronto

In term of general life satisfaction also, these people have shown a tremendously satisfied level of life and Kurds from all four countries, simultaneously indicated a much higher level of general life satisfaction, even though they might have shown a relative lower subjective quality of life either. In term of “material life satisfaction”, although the situation doesn’t stay the same as “general life satisfaction” or level of “happiness”, but still it indicates a relative high satisfaction almost in all parts of Kurdistan within the Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Canada. Generally dissatisfaction in material life condition between the Kurdish immigrants of Canada is very marginal and it has led to a relative high subjective quality of life and general life satisfaction in 2011. From the total 92 Kurdish immigrants who, have indicated of being “satisfied” to “very satisfied” with their general financial / material life condition, more than one third originate from Iranian Kurdistan, 20 are from Turkish Kurdistan, 14 from Iraqi Kurdistan and only 12 from Syrian Kurdistan. The findings of the above discussed research project show that the number of people, who have indicated of having a very unsatisfactory financial or material life conditions, is very marginal between the Kurdish immigrants from all four parts of Kurdistan.

A distribution of the general life satisfaction within the Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Canada by gender shows, that male and female populations are both enjoying a high satisfactory level, while at the extreme level of satisfaction even female Kurdish immigrants indicate a better life satisfaction; it means number of women with a “very satisfied” life condition is relative higher than the same category in Kurdish male population (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** General life satisfaction within Kurdish immigrants of Canada by gender in 2011

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani, unpublished field research 2011, Toronto

Findings of another research project<sup>3</sup> for the Iraqi Kurdistan region at the beginning of 2013 show an extremely better upshot on the population’s quality

3 This research has been conducted as a series of students’ collective field evaluation for different areas at universities of Salahaddin-Hawler, Duhok and Koya in 2012-2013.

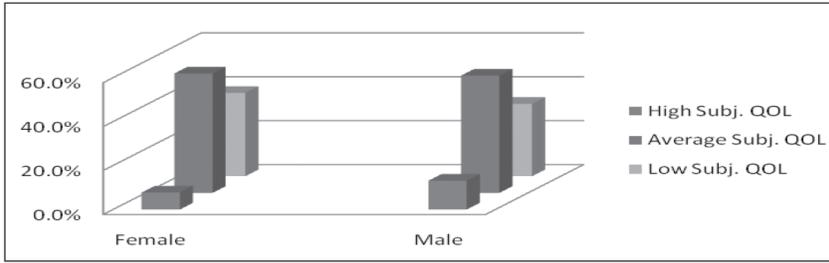
of life and well-being. According to such research the subjective quality of life of Kurdish population in Iraqi Kurdistan region is overwhelmingly higher than the one of Kurdish immigrants to Canada in 2011. While one fifth of the Kurds in Canada show a high subjective quality of life in 2011, this rate for Kurdish population of Iraqi Kurdistan indicates much higher than one third of the people. From 386 people, who have been interviewed in 2012-13, 137 people indicated to have a high subjective quality of life, and only 40 people showed a low subjective quality of life, which accounts for only 10 percent of all people (See table 2).

Level	Frequency	Percent
High Subj. QoL	137	35.5
Average Subj. QoL	208	53.9
Low Subj. QoL	40	10.4
Missing Value	1	3.
<b>Total</b>	386	100

**Table 2: Subjective Quality of Life in Kurdistan region, 2013**

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani, unpublished field research 2013, UoD, Kurdistan

As it has been often discussed, the people's "happiness" accounts for one of the most important elements in subjective quality of life index, which its level accelerates to a very high rate within the Kurdistan population in 2013. According to the research findings, 68 percent of all women and close to 60 percent of men show a high to very high happiness level in Iraqi Kurdistan region, while less than 7 percent of women and less than 9 percent of men indicated of being unhappy or very unhappy. The situation in term of general life satisfaction is even better: about 75 percent of women and 63 percent of men showed a high or very high general life satisfaction, while only 6 percent of each gender indicated to be unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their general life conditions. In term of material life satisfaction also the situation remains almost the same with exception of a small increase in men's rates. While over 72 percent of women are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their material life, this for men, reduces to a bit over 60 percent. But the number of men with "unsatisfied" or "very unsatisfied" level of material life takes a rate of over 11 percent, while the same indicator for women stays as low as 5.6 percent mark (Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** Kurdistan region's subjective quality of life by gender in 2013

Source: Fereydoon Rahmani, unpublished field research 2013, UoD, Kurdistan

Further detailed analysis of findings shows that the marginal rates of subjective life dissatisfactions go to younger people, who have finished their high school or are at colleague stage. From 386 people interviewed in Kurdistan region of Iraq, only 40 people show to have a low subjective quality of life, from which 25 were college students or high school graduates; so it means a big portion of people with low subjective quality of life were young students and high school graduates, which require special attention in the economic developments and social planning projects by the Kurdistan regional government. The same way, from 30 people who indicated to be “unhappy” or “very unhappy” with their own life, 25 people are high school graduates or a college or university student.

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