

# Load shedding – how it has affected people in metro areas

At least a half of metropolitan residents have been badly affected by load shedding, both in their personal lives and financially. This is according to a survey last month by marketing and social insights company TNS Research Surveys.

Conducted 7 – 22 February 2008, the aim was to ascertain how people feel about load shedding and how it has affected them. This survey was conducted among a sample of 2000 South African adults from the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa, interviewing them face-to-face in their homes, with a margin of error of under 2.5%.

## What have been the effects?

People were asked to agree or disagree with five statements to do with load-shedding and how it has affected their lives:

*“Load shedding is having little effect on my life.”*

- Agree – 50% (blacks – 53%, whites – 45%, coloureds – 50%, Indians/Asians – 41%)
- Disagree – 46%
- Don't know – 4%

Differences by area are small, with East London and Port Elizabeth residents being less affected (60% and 65% respectively agreed with this statement).

However, some people have been affected quite severely:

*“I have been caught in grid-locked traffic because of load shedding.”*

- Agree – 39% (blacks – 33%, whites – 62%, coloureds – 35%, Indians/Asians – 33%)
- Disagree – 58%
- Don't know – 3%

These figures were much higher in Gauteng (45%), especially Johannesburg (63%) (excluding Soweto and the East and West Rand) and low in the Eastern Cape (11% in Port Elizabeth and 22% in East London).

*“I have been caught in a lift because of load shedding.”*

- Agree – 12% (blacks – 12%, whites – 12%, coloureds – 14%, Indians/Asians – 8%)
- Disagree – 85%

- Don't know – 3%

Again, Johannesburg residents were more affected (19%) with the Eastern Cape low at 4%.

This has led 54% of metro adults to say that load shedding is affecting them badly financially (especially blacks at 59% and those in Gauteng (57%) (especially the Vaal Triangle/South Rand (73%), West Rand residents (68%)) and Durban residents (62%)). Cape Town at 45% and the Eastern Cape at 39% are the least affected financially. Overall, 69% say that is making their lives much more difficult.

What actions have people taken?

Some people have taken a number of substantive actions to cope with load shedding, with those more likely to have acted being the more affluent. The survey probed mostly actions that involved the purchase of equipment to alleviate the effects of load shedding.

*"I have bought standby lights and torches because of load shedding."*

- 46% agree (59% in Johannesburg excluding Soweto, and the Vaal Triangle/South Rand)

*"I have bought gas equipment to cope with Eskom's load shedding."*

- 27% agree (37% in Cape Town)

*"I have bought a generator to cope with Eskom's load shedding."*

- 10% agree (13% in Pretoria)

*"I have installed a solar power system to help supply electricity."*

- 6% agree (10% in Pretoria)

*"I have installed solar water heating."*

- 5% agree (8% in Durban)

Among upper-income people, standby lights and torches were mentioned by 60%, gas equipment by 39%, generators by 14%, solar power systems by 6% and solar water heating by 5%.

## **Whose fault do people think all this is?**

Perhaps not surprisingly, people tend to blame both Government and Eskom:

*"Our lack of enough electricity is Eskom's fault."*

- Agree – 74% (blacks – 71%, whites – 76%, coloureds – 79%, Indians/Asians – 80%)
- Disagree – 19%
- Don't know – 7%

*"Our lack of enough electricity is the Government's fault."*

- Agree – 69% (blacks – 63%, whites – 83%, coloureds – 73%, Indians/Asians – 79%)
- Disagree – 19%
- Don't know – 12%

## And what are the longer term consequences?

The longer term effects are seen in a very serious light by all sectors of the population:

*“Load shedding will have a big effect on the economy.”*

- Agree – 87% (blacks – 84%, whites – 95%, coloureds – 88%, Indians/Asians – 87%)
- Disagree – 8%
- Don't know – 5%

*“Load shedding by Eskom will not be a problem for very long.”*

- Agree – 30% (blacks – 33%, whites – 22%, coloureds – 50%, Indians/Asians – 27%)
- Disagree – 49%
- Don't know – 21%

However, there are mixed views on the effect of load shedding on our preparations for the 2010 World Cup, with blacks being fairly optimistic and whites being very pessimistic:

*“Load shedding should not affect our preparations for the 2010 World Cup very much.”*

- Agree – 53% (blacks – 65%, whites – 26%, coloureds – 44%, Indians/Asians – 56%)
- Disagree – 35%
- Don't know – 12%

## Survey conclusions

At least a half of metropolitan residents surveyed in February 2008 have been badly affected by load shedding, both in their personal lives and financially. On service delivery issues, in the past, TNS Research Surveys has identified a 30% negative response rate as one where anger levels become serious. This anger will be directed at both Eskom and Government as people feel both carry some blame, says the research company. It is important for both Eskom and Government (at all levels) to realise the extent of this anger, especially when communicating to people about load shedding, power outages and the saving of electricity.

People in the Eastern Cape appear to have been the least affected, at least insofar as metro areas are concerned. Residents of Gauteng have felt the most affects, as well as, to some extent, people living in Durban.

Many people, especially the more affluent, have taken various steps to ameliorate the effects of load shedding, with standby lighting, gas equipment and generators being the most frequently purchased items. Solar power did not receive very high responses but it must be recalled that this survey took place in February and that such systems are expensive and may be seen as longer term solutions, still to be implemented.

Long term effects on the economy are felt to be serious and protracted, and there are mixed feelings about the effect on the 2010 World Cup preparations.

- The studies are conducted amongst a sample of 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas: they have a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys as part of its ongoing research into current social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys.

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