

More dimensions to household preparedness

Recently the energy crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have gotten the Swedish government on their toes. To prepare for potential crises or war, the government encourages all inhabitants to start ‘prepping’. Everyone should prepare themselves to live without everyday services for a minimum of one week; this is known as household preparedness. Now, it is important for the government to understand the preparedness of its inhabitants better- so that nobody falls through the cracks if the unthinkable happens.

More dimensions of preparedness – There are countless methods for researching household preparedness, but many of them show an incomplete picture. In this study, we distinguish between *Physical, Social, Human, Natural* and *Financial* dimensions of household preparedness. These dimensions helped us to explore all the important preparedness resources. Looking at these different dimensions also allows us to recognize that some resources can be used to replace other resources, or act as backups. For example, if the electricity goes out and the heaters no longer work, people could layer up with warm clothes, but if they have a woodstove or borrow extra blankets from a neighbour, that would work too.

Actual preparedness – The municipality of Ljungby is one of many municipalities in Sweden that has not measured the preparedness of their inhabitants. This makes it difficult for them to make preparedness plans for the whole municipality. We measured the preparedness of the inhabitants. We found that the inhabitants had neither good nor bad preparedness. They mostly had physical preparedness items. In fact, they had more physical preparedness items than the average Swede! Preparedness in the human dimension, meaning having knowledge and skills, was not so good. In particular, few people had crisis plans or had practiced them. The least well-prepared people were younger households, households living in apartments or attached houses, households living in Ljungby town rather than the countryside, and households with a member who has a disability.

Perceived preparedness – Sweden wants inhabitants to improve their household preparedness, but if a household thinks they are already well prepared, they might feel like they do not need to prepare more. Because of that we also studied perceived preparedness. In Ljungby municipality, households overestimated their preparedness. In the figure below, you can see that most people thought their preparedness was quite good, but this did not really match the preparedness we measured they had. More than half of households thought that they would require help from public services if a crisis were to last up to a week or longer. If their estimations are correct, the majority do not meet the recommendations of the national government.

Between actual and perceived – Scholars have also been interested in the relationship between actual and perceived household preparedness, and because of that we looked into the correlations between them. We found that all dimensions of preparedness were strongly positively correlated with perception, although most previous research found weak to moderate correlations. We found that overall preparedness most closely reflected perceived preparedness, meaning that including all types of preparedness together formed the best prediction for households' perceptions. The dimension with the strongest correlation to perceived preparedness was the physical dimension. One explanation for this might be that government authorities most commonly recommend physical items. Social preparedness was the dimension which was least correlated with perceived preparedness. During group discussions we found out that people found social preparedness very important, but they would not think of it when thinking about prepping.

In conclusion - Our study shows that while many inhabitants in Ljungby municipality have physical preparedness items, they lack preparedness in other important dimensions such as human preparedness. Household in Ljungby overestimated their level of preparedness. But, Physical, Social, Human, Natural and Financial preparedness were all correlated to perceptions of preparedness. We think that if all dimensions are important, it is difficult to make conclusions about correlations between household preparedness and perceptions of preparedness when only few resources are considered, which is why looking at preparedness as these five dimensions was fruitful.

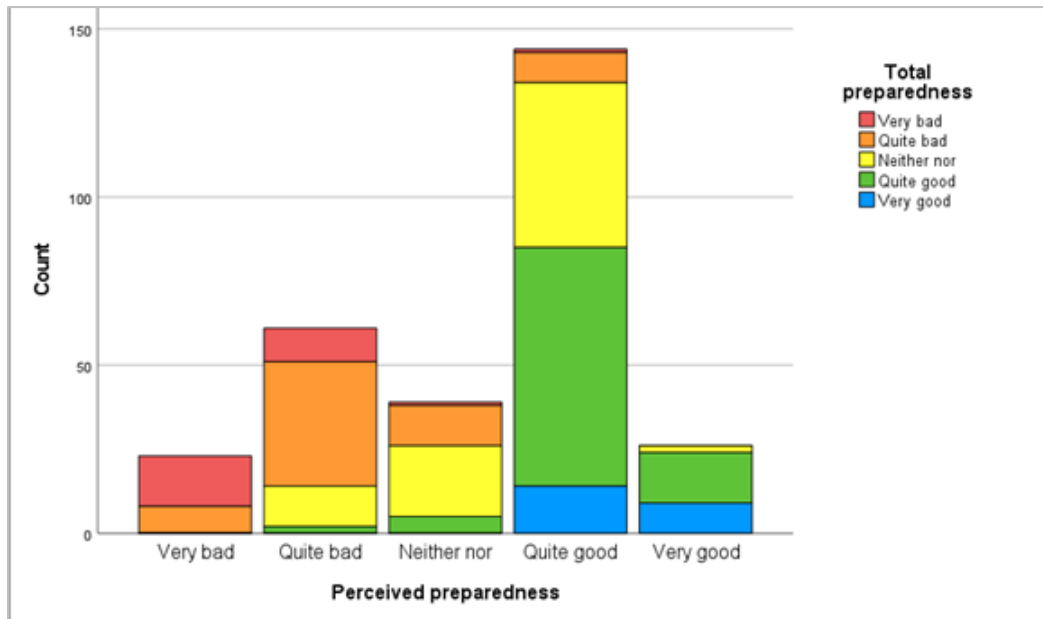


Image 1: bar chart showing the distribution of households' total preparedness within each category of perceived preparedness.