



An Exploratory Study on the Coping Strategies of Minimum Wage Earners in a Developing Country

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CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

- Located in the central Caribbean approximately 90 miles from Cuba and 100 miles from Haiti.
- It is the largest of the English speaking Caribbean islands and is the largest demographic unit of the region with a population of approximately 2.93 million.
- Like its neighbors, Jamaica is vulnerable to natural disasters - such as hurricanes and flooding - and the effects of climate change.
- It is an upper middle-income economy that is nevertheless struggling due to low growth, high public debt, and exposure to external shocks.
- Inequality in Jamaica is lower than in most countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region, but poverty at 19% in 2017 is still significant.

Jamaica



BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Part of a larger Study that seeks to:

- To illuminate the lived experiences of minimum-wage earners
- To Investigate the coping strategies of minimum wage earners
- To explore the issues that arise for minimum-wage earners and their families
- To understand how minimum-wage earners deal with challenging situations that they face in the course of their lives

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is it like to experience life as a minimum wage earner within the country of the study?
2. What strategies do minimum wage earners employ to cope with the challenges they encounter?

METHODOLOGY

- Exploratory Research Design
- Data collected via 12 focus groups in 12 parishes of the country, on average 5 – 10 persons each
- Respondents comprised males and females: domestic workers, shop-workers and self employed (hustlers) personnel earning at the level of minimum wage.
- Analysis: In vivo Coding followed by concept coding to establish themes

FINDINGS: What is it like to experience life as a minimum wage earner within the country of the study?

Marginalized, Discriminated & Devalued

- “Modern day Slavery”
- Unfair treatment

Emotionally Stressful

“Rough’, “depressing”, “hopeless”,
“impossible to live”, “stressful”, “victimize”

Working but Poor

- “hand to mouth”
- “What lef” (What is left)
- ‘Not livable wage

“Poor is the biggest crime you have because you are hanged, especially when you are employed to people you are hanged because yuh haffi settle fi likkle an noting. A slavery mentality.....”

“.....sometimes the bass them try to even use the worker and if you are not up to them at times you are being abused.” You are being victamised an all a dat. But its been rough....”

So its really roughyou might want one hairstyle and cant buy it. One morning me going work and me shoe bottom burst and me have to work with the shoes bottom and me work into kitchen. So you know that’s a wet up foot. So it’s really rough. You have to try survive off of whatever because you are pushing because of your kids.

At di end a di day yuh work so hard an if yuh sick right now you caan go doctor an if yuh go doctor yuh caan find food. The work is so stressful it cause yuh to get sick an by time yuh go to doctor yuh caan buy food fi eat.

FINDINGS: What strategies do minimum wage earners employ to cope with the challenges they encounter? -

Strategies

- **Diversification of income as a means of Survival**
- **Reliance on God and support network**
- **Creative Budgeting**
- **Creativity- “Tun Hand mek Fashion”**

What I do for living? What you would call it Entrepreneur. Well I do janitorial work. I do selling. I do construction work. Caan really sew but mi will trim up. Caan do hair but me cream it. Me do everything.

I thank God to know that I am here and that I am a part of this program this morning. Am a burn-out victim as well and to God be the glory I am still here to know that although I was burn out I still have a roof over my head and di roof what I have over my head is salvation. Am a mother. Am a madda of four children. (choke up) It is really hard to say but to God be the glory. He keep me and bring me tru every circumstances dat I face in life.

“.....sometimes, I don’t earn a dollar for two weeks, but hear what, God still make good people, Sometimes people come at your rescue, come and deliver”

Let me tell you how I feed my children. I cook dinner this evening, they eat breakfast from it tomorrow morning, cause I can’t provide breakfast and dinner. You understand, so in the morning, I warm up that and I take it and I give them a warm cup of tea, later on down the line then they can understand.

DISCUSSION

The Psycho-social & Economic Burdens of the Minimum Wage Earner

- Marginalized, Discriminated & Devalue
- Emotionally Stressful
- Working but Poor

Life experience

Poverty is much more than a lack of resources. It involves a complex set of social relationships, such as economic disadvantage, insecurity or a lack of rights. These relational elements tell us what poverty is – what it consists of, what poor people are experiencing, and what problems need to be addressed. (Paul Spicker, 2020).

DISCUSSION

Coping Strategies

Resilience and Self Efficacy

- Diversification of income as a means of Survival
- Reliance on God and support network
- Creative Budgeting
- Creativity - Tun Hand mek Fashion

- *Coping strategies may be seen as grounded in the cultural practices of the society*
 - *Jamaica is a deeply religious society*
 - *Proverbs like “tun yuh han mek fashion” (Be creative)*
 - *Don’t put all your eggs in one basket (Diversify your options)*
 - *One –one cocoa full basket (every little counts)*
- *Resilience can be demonstrated regardless of sociocultural backgrounds or physiological or functional deficits and marginalized populations may possess resilience (Fullen & Gorby (2016).*
- *From the social psychological literature self efficacy emerges as a key concept from the perspective of those classified as being poor (Fell & Hewstone, 2015)*

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- *There is a growing body of research that situates matters of 'marginalization', stigmatization and discrimination within a broader social, cultural, political, and economic framework rather than as individual processes' (Parker and Aggleton, 2002) – **Structural perspective***
- How do we reimagine change for the dispossessed? What might this change look like?
- What factors do we need to consider to ensure the poor (dispossessed) **can experience a better quality of life in society?**

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