

PERCEIVED CAUSES OF POVERTY OF THE POST-APARTHEID GENERATION

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—Abstract—

This paper analyses the perceptions of the causes of poverty using the Feagin Scale of Poverty Perceptions. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. It was found that the respondents viewed the causes of poverty as being more structural and individualistic than fatalistic.

Key Words: *Poverty perceptions, Econometric modelling, Apartheid*

JEL Classification: I30, C10, N47.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Poverty constitutes a danger to prosperity (Rodgers, 1995). Poverty is seen in all its manifestations as a denial of the opportunities and choices that underpin improved standard of living and human development (Viljoen & Sekhampu, 2013). Despite this, there is no cohesive, universally accepted definition of poverty (UNDP, 2006). This is because poverty is a concept that encompasses more than just the economics of poverty but is a condition that impacts on the psychosocial development of its sufferers (Sen, 1999).

In South Africa, poverty and inequality have been exacerbated by institutionalised discrimination. Colonial and Union government policies directed at the extraction of cheap labour were built upon by apartheid legislation. The result was a process of state-sanctioned underdevelopment that ensured social and economic exclusion for the majority of South Africans (Aliber, 2001). The apartheid regime was underpinned by the Population Registrations Act which classified South Africans as either African, white, coloured, or Asian. The Group Areas Act of 1950 ensured residential segregation, often through forced relocation. Non-white South Africans became citizens of one of ten tribally-based self-governing homelands (Bantustans). Apartheid sparked significant civil conflict as well as international censure (Viljoen & Sekhampu, 2013).

With the democratisation of the country came the expectations and promises of improved economic and political conditions. These expectations involved not only the policies that new government would implement to improve the lives of the current generation but also what would be done to ensure that the post-apartheid generation (also termed the born-free generation) would not have to experience the deprivations that their forefathers did (Mattes, 2011). The years following the end of apartheid saw a rise in poverty alleviation strategies. Included in these strategies are the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR) and the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA). According to Mubangizi (2008), these anti-poverty measures were not effective at alleviating poverty and redistributing income and economic opportunities to the previously disadvantaged.

Although South Africa recorded strong economic growth and a decline in the deficit following the end of apartheid, these positive indicators were hiding the pervasive nature of South Africa's apartheid past (Mattes, 2011). Leibbrandt and Levinsohn (2011) argue that the gap between the rich and the poor has become larger than the gap between blacks and whites. This has reinforced the belief that the post-apartheid generation faces the same, if not worse levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality than its predecessors. To overcome this potential obstacle the perceived causes of poverty should be measured in order to mitigate its psychosocial impact on the current generation. Policies that alleviate poverty as it is perceived by the current generation is key to overriding the effects of apartheid (Terreblanche, 2002).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

What people perceive as the causes of poverty is an essential component of a country's economic development culture (Lepianka et al., 2009). A study done by Feagin (1972) was the first to examine the perceived causes of poverty. Feagin developed a list of possible explanations of poverty, which he categorised into three main types, namely individualistic (poverty is caused by the poor themselves, for example, they lack the effort to find employment, they waste money and they waste their money on inappropriate things); structural (external and economic forces are at fault, for example, society lacks social justice, the poor are exploited, etc.); and fatalistic (factors beyond the control of society, for example, bad luck, bad fate, born inferior, etc.). Several studies built on Feagin's earlier work (Sun, 2001; Davids, 2010; Yun & Weaver, 2010). Factorial analysis is applied to a series of items that attempt to capture the underlying themes of poverty attributions. In most cases, the original, validated three-tier classification of poverty attribution held.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

The data were collected from a university in southern Gauteng, South Africa. A convenience nonprobability sampling procedure was used to recruit participants. The questionnaires were administered so students in their classrooms after permission had been obtained by the lecturers concerned. The students were told that the purpose of the questionnaire was to explore their perceptions of the causes of poverty and that participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed in Table 1. Gender distribution of the sample included 107 males (42.6%) and 144 females (57.4%). When the sample is disaggregated, 73.3% are black Africans, 25.9 % are white. Coloured and Asian groups accounted for 0.4% of the sample respectively. The age categories were collapses into those aged 18-19, 20-21 and 22-23. The mean age of the sample 19.49 years old (SD=1.171).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 251)

Variable	Values	N	Percent
Gender	Male	107	42.6
	Female	144	57.4
Race	Black	184	73.3
	White	65	25.9
	Coloured	1	0.4
	Asian	1	0.4
Age	18-19	150	63.7
	20-21	75	29.8
	22-23	16	6.5

Source: Calculation from survey data: 2013

3.2. Research instrument

The survey drew on the Feagin Poverty Scale (Feagin, 1972) to measure student's perceptions of the causes of poverty and to gather demographic information on the respondents. The poverty perceptions questions asked respondents to indicate on a Likert-scale whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements regarding why people are poor. The responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The statements included "poor people are poor because" 1) they lack luck, 2) they have bad fate, 3) they have encountered misfortunes, 4) they are born inferior, 5) they are not motivated because of welfare, 6) distribution of wealth in the society is uneven, 7) the society lacks social justice, 8) they are exploited by the rich, 9) the lack opportunities due to the fact that they live in poor families, 10) they waste their money on inappropriate items, 11) the lack the ability to manage money, and 12) they do not actively seek to improve their lives.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated, the individualistic, structural and fatalistic perceptions of the causes of poverty are key predictor variables for the study. The fatalistic causes of poverty relate to statements 1-5, the structural causes relate to statements 6-9 and the individualistic causes relate to statements 10-12. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Principal Component Extraction and Varimax rotation. Reliability analysis was also conducted.

The data set can be considered suitable for factor analysis as the KMO value is 0.704 and Bartlett's test is significant ($p = .000$), which is smaller than .05 (Pallant, 2010).

The results of the analysis confirm those found by Feagin (1972), Sun (2001) and Davids (2010). Three unrotated factors were extracted. Factor 1 (Fatalistic causes) explains 25.48% of the variance (Eigenvalue of 3.057), Factor 2 (Structural causes) explains 17.67% of the variance (Eigenvalue of 2.120) and Factor 3 (individualistic causes) explains 14.26% of the variance (Eigenvalue of 1.711).

Table 2 indicates the factor loadings for the each of the items as well as the alpha coefficients for each of the three factors.

Table 2: Factor analysis of the perceptions of the causes of poverty

	Component		
	1	2	3
They lack luck	.748		
They have bad fate	.823		
They have encountered misfortunes	.665		
They are born inferior	.641		
They are not motivated because of welfare	.413		.342
Distribution of wealth in society is uneven			.800
The society lacks social justice			.757
They are exploited by the rich			.713
They lack opportunities due to the fact that they live in poor families			.597
They waste their money on inappropriate items		.853	
They lack the ability to manage money		.900	
They do not actively seek to improve their lives		.814	
Cronbach's Alpha (standardised items)	.715	.711	.826

Source: Calculated from survey results: 2013

The study showed that the respondents perceived poverty in structural ($M = 3.2071$, $SD = .89745$) and individualistic dimensions ($M = 3.1965$, $SD = 1.11$) more than in the fatalistic dimension ($M = 2.2052$, $SD = .87019$).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study argued that the identification of the perceptions of the causes of poverty are necessary for policy development. In order to overcome the inequalities of the past and provide for future generations, government authorities should aim policies and programmes towards mitigating the negative connotations of poverty that are associated with its causes.

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