

Household Heads Gender Comparison of Perceived Causes of Poverty in a South African Township

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Abstract

This study compared perceptions of the causes of poverty among female and male households' heads in a South African township. A survey questionnaire was used with a sample of 225 households 156 headed by males and 69 headed by females, randomly selected from Kwakwatsi Township. Instrument used to measure perceptions of the causes of poverty was drawn from The Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty Scale (PCPS) developed by Joe Feagin. In general, the analysis showed that the larger number of Kwakwatsi population was inclined to attribute poverty to individualistic factors, compared to structural and fatalistic factors. Independent t-test indicated that female and male household's heads expressed similar within the structural and individualistic explanations of the causes of poverty, but they differed significantly in the importance they attributed to the fatalistic attributions. Males reported a higher significant level of inclination to the fatalistic causes of poverty than females. This study confirmed that the link between the perception of causes of poverty and gender cannot be generalised.

Keywords: Causes of poverty, household headship, township; South Africa

1. Background

The concept and measurement of poverty have dominated the debate in the literature whilst the problem of what people consider to be the reasons for living in poverty has often given a little attention. However, the public views of causes of poverty are very crucial on academic grounds as much as policymakers are concerned. The Platform for action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995 adopted that, "*more than one billion people in the world, the great majority of whom are women mostly in the developing countries, live in unacceptable conditions of poverty*" (UN, 1996). There is also a growing support in the literature of fundamental differences in gender perceptions of poverty. Men equate poverty with a lack of assets, while women associate poverty with a lack of ability to provide for household's consumption (May, 2001). Johnsson-Latham (2002) noticed that males link poverty to a lack of self-esteem and respect, while there were no women who appeared to pay attention to requesting respect. Tanzanian women rank food shortage, water and health as the three most signs of poverty, while men rated the shortage associated to transportation and farming and drunkenness (Narayan, 2007). In terms of wealth, perceptions of males and females also tend to differ. For example, Tanzanian women and men describe who is "very rich" differently. Women classified someone with 80 cows as "very rich", while men said that a person should have 3000 cows to be classified as "very rich" (Narayan, 1997). Since poverty affects males and females in different ways and that they define poverty differently, it might be the case that their views towards the causes of poverty may differ.

There has been discussion about the reasons why the poor are poor. The social sciences offer a wide range of theoretical literature on the causes of poverty. Feagin (1972) grouped the beliefs about the causes of poverty into 3 categories: individualistic, structural and fatalistic factors. In Individualistic explanations, characteristics of persons are used to explain poverty. Poverty is seen as a result of internal factors, such as lack of thrift and effort and loose morals. In structural poverty attributions, larger socio-economic system is seen as the cause of poverty. The structural approach emphasizes that the poor are in an unfavourable position in structural hierarchies. The poor are victims of social structures. Fatalistic explanations point out supra-individual but non-social structure forces (such as luck and chance) as a source of poverty. The fatalistic approach adds the fate factor to the explanations of poverty. Poverty can be caused by uncontrollable and inescapable factors operating beyond the agency of any type of social actor (Halman & Van Oorschot, 1999). Studies (Feagin, 1972; 1975) found individualistic attributions to be more strongly supported than other explanations and that influenced trends of considering poverty as a sign of personal and moral failure. However, Nasser and Abouchedid (2001), Nasser et al. (2005) and Wollie (2009) found the structural factors of poverty to be the

predominant causal factor for poverty followed by individualistic and fatalistic.

There is a considerable demographic variability in beliefs about poverty which needs a closer analysis. Looking in the existing literature of the perception of causes of poverty, researchers, (Hunt 1996, Sun 2001, Cozzarelli, et al., 2001) showed that women gave more structural causes of poverty than men; while Morcöl (1997) indicated that men prefer structural explanations than women. Shirazi and Biel (2005) argued that there is a limited theoretical and empirical foundation for forecasting about gender differences in causal attributions for financial failure. Frieze et al. (1982) reviewed 21 studies of attributional gender differences and found only two consistent results: Men attribute their successes and failures less luck than women. These findings indicate few consistent gender differences of noticeable magnitude. Despite the fact that these results might appear discouraging, however, there is no reason to believe that the perceptions of the causes of poverty are the same everywhere in the world. Therefore, country or small area specific analysis is indispensable.

Findings in research on performance evaluation suggest that gender differences in causal attributions result from any externality (situation) bias among women and/or internality bias among men may lead to gender difference in performance evaluation (Rice, 2001). Traditionally, females are considered incompetent, dependent and inferior to males (Wollie, 2009). This seems to have its own impact on the less favourable attribution pattern of women. However, the position in turn hampers female self-enhancement, achievement motivation and an optimistic view of their futures than their male counterparts. In most societies, women hold low-control social roles and are more dependent on external factors than men (Rice, 2001). Culture, tradition and stereotypes have always contributed to the gender division of labour. Women have to be generally in charge of caring for children, the disabled and elderly in the household (Evandrou & Glaser, 2003). Women work fewer hours or cease working to carry out household unpaid activities (Evandrou & Glaser, 2003). These responsibilities limit the opportunities for women to develop and improve their skills and accumulate assets. Chen et al. (2005) confirm that since 1970 there has been an increasing trend of females participating in the labour market in either part-time or full-time work, despite disparities between the salaries of women and men (gender pay gap) and working conditions. Women's jobs continue to be mostly in the informal sector and part-time work and are described in Cs (caring, cleaning, catering and cash registers) which pay less (Chen et al., 2005; Okojie, 2003; Rai, 2002; World Bank, 2005a). These differences in opportunities may explain why male and female perceptions of causes of poverty tend to differ.

In a South African Township context, perceptions of causes of poverty among females and males are particularly relevant because of the persistent higher incidence of female below the poverty line (StatsSA, 2011) and wider socio-economic inequalities despite the continuing decline of poverty in terms of the head count ratio (StatsSA, 2012). Therefore, it is important to find out how females and males understand the causes of poverty in terms of individualistic, structural fatalistic factors in a South African township. The purpose of this study is to assess the degree to which females differ from their male counterparts in their perceptions of causes of poverty. The ideology formed by gender analysis concerning the perceptions of causes of poverty can considerably help to develop an attribution literature in South African townships, relatively to other studies reporting data on attributions of causes of poverty in other areas.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

2.1 Participants

A sample of 225 households was randomly selected to meet the analytical needs of this study. In order to collect the necessary data, a survey questionnaire was undertaken. The main participants to the survey were the household heads. In total, 225 household's heads (156 male and 69 females) based in Kwakwatsi Township, Ngwathe Local Municipality, Free State province of South Africa participated in this study. Kwakwatsi is a former black residential township for the town of Koppies, located 180km south of Johannesburg with its head office in Parys (Muzindutsi & Sekhampu, 2014). Kwakwatsi Township was selected for this study because it is seen as a semi-urban area, evidenced by lack of economic development and conditions of poverty (Sekhampu, 2012).

2.2 Research instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire that measured households' socio-economic, demographic characteristics and perceptions of the causes of poverty. Question items that measured perceptions of the causes of poverty were drawn from the Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty Scale (PCPS) developed by Joe Feagin (Feagin, 1972; 1975). This scale consists of 12 items describing a broad range of individual, structural, and fatalistic causes of poverty. There are grouped

into three categories namely, the individualistic, fatalistic and structural factors. More specifically, respondents rated each possible cause of poverty on a five-point Likert-type scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with the higher values indicating a greater importance as to why people perceived such cause poverty.

Under individualistic factors were these three statements: "(1) they waste their money on inappropriate items, (2) they lack the ability to manage money, (3) they do not actively seek to improve their lives. Under fatalistic factors were these statements: (4) they lack luck, (5) they have bad fate', (6) they have encountered misfortunes', '(7) they are born inferior and (8) they are not motivated because of welfare. Under structural factors were these statements (9) distribution of wealth in the society is uneven, (10) the society lacks social justice, (11) they are exploited by rich people, and (12) they lack opportunities due to the fact that they live in poor families.

Each of the three indices was evaluated for dimensionality and reliability through a procedure for reducing the dimensionality of a data set known as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and reliability test. This was done with the use of Kaiser's criterion. Kaiser's criterion states that only factors with an eigenvalue of 1.00 or greater are retained for analysis (Pallant, 2013). Cronbach's Alpha test was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire, while Bartlett's test for sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) were performed to measure the sampling adequacy and to determine the meaningfulness of performing principal component analysis. Principal component analysis is advisable only if the variables involved are sufficiently correlated. George and Mallery (2003) and Pallant (2013) stipulated that a Cronbach's Alpha value of greater than 0.6 means that the component is reliable. The sample is adequate when the KMO is greater or equal to 0.6, while the performance of principal component would be appropriate if Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ($p < 0.05$) (Pallant, 2013). All of statistical analyses of this study were performed by the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences statistics (SPSS) 22 version.

3. Results

All 12 items were loaded in the factor analysis to test for reliability and dimensionality using PCA. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was found to be 0.66 (which is above 0.6 suggested by Pallant, 2013) and that the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity p value was 0.000 indicating that correlation between items were sufficiently large for PCA. Cronbach's alpha of 0.8 was found, which shows that PCPS is a reliable instrument.

The way each item is correlated with an underlying factor is shown in Table 1. Eigenvalue of value equal or greater than 1 was considered valid when using the Kaiser's criterion. Component 1 (Individualistic index) recorded an eigenvalue of 2.610 that explains 20.07 percent of the common variance to all six of the items. Component 2 (Fatalistic index) recorded eigenvalue of 2.419 and percentage of variance of 18.61%. Component 3 (Structural index) had an eigenvalue of 1.987 that explains 15.28 percent of the common variance to all the items. In total all the three components explained about 54% of the common variance.

The elements found to be in individualistic perceptions of poverty are "they waste money on inappropriate items" (0.807), "they do not actively seek to improve themselves" (0.801), "the rich exploit the poor" (0.761), "they lack the ability to manage money" (0.694). However, the item, "they are exploited by rich people" did not support the theory of Feagin (1972). The theory considers the item "they are exploited by rich people" as a structural factor, however, the participants of this study perceived it as individualistic factor. The Cronbach's Alpha accounted to 0.8 which suggests the internal consistency of individualistic index.

Items in the second component (fatalistic) includes: "they lack luck" (0.735), "they are not motivated by welfare" (0.687), "they have encountered misfortunes" (0.681), "they have bad fate" (0.556) and "they are born inferior" (0.493). Fatalistic dimension was found reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha 0.63. The third component, related to structural perceptions of poverty, covered; "they lack social justice" (0.325), "they lack opportunities due to the fact that they born in poor families" (0.735), "they live in places they not many opportunities" (0.703) and "distribution of wealth is uneven" (0.634). The results have shown that structural is composed of 4 factors instead of 5 identified by theory. The factor of being exploited by the rich was categorised as individualistic perception of the causes of poverty. The structural Cronbach's Alpha was at 0.7 suggesting internal consistency.

Table 1: Component matrix

Reasons why poor people are poor	Components		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: Individualistic			
They waste money on inappropriate items	0.807		
They do not actively seek to improve themselves	0.801		
They are exploited by rich people	0.761		
They lack the ability to manage money	0.694		
Factor 2: Fatalistic			
They lack luck		0.735	
They are not motivated because of welfare		0.687	
They have encountered misfortune		0.681	
They have bad fate		0.556	
They are born inferior		0.493	
Factor 3: Structural			
The society lacks social justice			0.325
They lack opportunities due to the fact that they born in poor families			0.733
They live in places where they are not many opportunities			0.703
Distribution of wealth is uneven			0.634
Kaiser-Meyer Olkin Measure	0.665	0.665	0.665
Cronbach's Alpha	0.8	0.63	0.7

Table 2 reports gender distribution of perception of the causes of poverty. It shows that the larger number of Kwakwatsi population (50.66%) was inclined to attribute poverty to individualistic factors compared to structural (25%) and fatalistic factors (28.8%). This is consistent with the findings of Feagin (1972) who found individualistic attributions to be more strongly supported than other explanations. However, when it comes to the comparison, more males (51.9%) appeared to be inclined to attribute poverty individualistic factors than females did (47.8%). From Table 2, more males (28.8%) than females (20.3%) seemed to believe fatalistic factors as cause of poverty.

Table 2: Perception of the causes of poverty across gender

Gender of the household head	Individualistic perception		Structural perception		Fatalistic perception	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Female	47.8%	52.2%	34.8%	65.2%	20.3%	79.7%
Male	51.9%	48.1%	25%	75%	28.8%	71.2%
Total	50.67%	49.33%	28%	72%	26.22%	73.78%

Even though, the above table shows the difference in percentage of how males and females of Kwakwatsi perceived the causes of poverty, in quantitative data analysis, there are several statistical tests that can be used to examine significance of differences between two or more groups. An independent samples t-test was used to examine if there is a significant difference on perceptions of the causes of poverty between male and female. Independent t-test indicated that although the females and males expressed similar levels of agreement with the structural and individualistic explanations of poverty, they differed significantly in the importance they attributed to the fatalistic perceptions ($t=2.54$, $df = 117.62$, $p < .05$). Males ($M=3.35$, $SD =0.84$) reported significantly higher levels inclination to the fatalistic factors of causes of poverty than females ($M =3.03$, $SD=0.94$).

Table 3: Mean comparison

Factor	Female		Male		T test	Sig. (2-tailed).
	M	SD	M	SD		
Individualistic	3.59	0.96	3.61	01.00	0.73	0.94
Structural	3.30	0.71	3.22	0.82	-0.74	0.46
Fatalistic	3.03	0.94	3.35	0.84	2.43	0.01

4. Discussion

The analysis showed that a larger number of Kwakwatsi population was inclined to attributing causes of poverty to individualistic factors, compared to structural and fatalistic factors. This is consistent with the findings of Feagin (1972) who found individualistic attributions to be more strongly supported than other explanations. However, these findings do not support those of Nasser and Abouché (2001), Nasser et al. (2005) and Wollie (2009) who found the structural factors of poverty to be perceived as the predominant causal factors for poverty.

Independent t-test indicated that although the females and males expressed similar levels of agreement with the structural and individualistic explanations of poverty, they differed significantly in the importance they attributed to the fatalistic attributions. Males reported significantly higher levels inclination to the fatalistic factors of causes of poverty than females. A considerable proportion of males compared to females regard bad luck, bad fate, misfortune and born inferior as reasons for poverty. This finding supports that of Sun (2001) who found that males weighted the importance of the fatalistic factor more heavily than did their female counterparts. The results of the current study are also consistent with that of Wollie (2009) who found a statistical significance difference of gender on fatalistic dimension of poverty, while it had no any significant effects all other attributions of poverty (structural and individualistic). Nevertheless, in the case of Wollie (2009) females were more inclined to fatalistic explanations than males. This was also found by Frieze et al. (1982) who indicated that males did not attribute poverty to fatalistic factors. Cozzarelli et al. (2001) showed that women appeared to give more structural causes of poverty than men; while Morcöl (1997) indicated that men prefer structural explanations.

It is useful to consider some of the possible explanations for these inconsistencies. This can be raised by the fact that socio-demographic factors are always analysed on the basis of specific data of a country or region. Some personal backgrounds and experiences also still hold strong power in forming individual beliefs. Therefore, these patterns are not consistent in building a solid hypothesis associated with perceptions of the causes of poverty across gender. In most societies, women hold low-control social roles and are, therefore, more dependent on external factors than are men (Rice, 2001). The finding of this study might be derived from the fact that it used the sample of female-headed households only. Persons and groups of persons in roles in which they have limited control and power over changes in their environment, including their own outcomes, are logically more inclined to attribute changes to external factors than person with more control (Shirazi & Biel, 2005). However, female households' heads are more independent and have more control over resources than other women who are not household heads. Moreover South Africa has been conducting campaigns and implementing numerous policies to ensure equal and fair access to the labour market by both men and women.

5. Conclusion

This study compared perceptions among females and males concerning causes of poverty. Both females and males appeared more likely to blame the individual and structural flaws at the same level in the current study. The only difference between male and female household's head appeared in the way the perceived fatalistic causes of poverty. Males reported higher significant levels of inclination to the fatalistic factors of causes of poverty than females. To ascertain the causal relationship between males and females attitudes towards the causes of poverty, more rigorous studies (e.g., samples of females and males in all categories) should be pursued. Comparisons between different time periods and townships would enrich our understanding of the phenomenon in question. It has to be considered whether the attributions of poverty vary between different disadvantaged populations (by comparing poor female with their male counterparts and non-poor males to their female counterparts).

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