

## ABSTRACT

Faces of Poverty: The Child Workers  
of the Informal Service Economy  
of Trinidad and Tobago

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This thesis, which is an examination of the roles of children in the informal service economy of Trinidad and Tobago, is set against the background of mounting evidence of the growth of child labour, regionally and internationally.

A literature review of the informal economy (internationally and in the Caribbean) is a central component of the study. It illustrates that the problem of conceptualization of the informal is one which preoccupies writers in this field.

The social dynamic approach, as put forward by Alejandro Portes, is the one which has been adopted by the author. It is considered to be most feasible, both for an analysis of the roles of children in this sphere of economic operations, and for a clearer understanding and appreciation of the fact that the analytical categories overlap because of the fluidity and dynamics of the process of informalization. While recognizing that the informal is not synonymous with poverty, the approach analyses the dynamics of social situations which enables situations of poverty to be produced. Minority groups, which include children, are part of this dynamics. Therefore, the context of the research is the informal economy,

because by focusing on the process of informality, one is able to grasp how, and why children become involved in informal activity.

The study is historically placed, as it looks at the roles played by children from slavery to emancipation, and the beginnings of the informal economy in Caribbean history. The socio-historical analysis of their roles is significant because children have remained largely invisible in history and sociology. The research, therefore, seeks to make them more visible.

The recommendations that are put forward point to the need for legislative reform in the area of child employment, and for the modification of education policies. At the level of the community, rehabilitative and employment-generation programmes, with the assistance of non-governmental and other private organizations, are also suggested, especially in light of structural adjustment programmes which curtail government's ability to fund social projects.