

## **ABSTRACT**

### **An Examination of Consumption Inequality And Stratification in Jamaica in the Decade of the 1990s**

**Pauline Audrey Knight**

The paper examines inequality in household consumption levels and linkages with social stratification in Jamaica over the 1990s. It seeks to identify causative factors for changes observed. Contending perspectives on the root causes of stratification and economic inequality are highlighted: the functionalists who emphasize rewards for individual characteristics and the structuralists who point to the actions of ruling institutional structures.

It is hypothesized that both have elements of the truth, but in the present case, structural factors were pre-eminent. However, social class distinctions have been becoming blurred because economic institutions have been dominating the stratification system and traditional status criteria had lost their importance.

Consumption inequality declined up to mid-decade then increased thereafter. It is deduced that these movements were caused by structural factors linked to economic contraction and recovery resulting from the structural reform programme. Thus the

reduction in inequality was not effected by desirable socio-economic developments, but was brought about by macro-economic shock which lowered consumption levels particularly for the wealthiest. Simultaneously, consumption levels were raised for low-consumption groups but mostly by factors outside of the customary range of labour market and human capital characteristics.

Stratification changes mirrored inequality movements. The highest level of educational achievement was the major criterion for strata demarcation, but such achievement was strongly dependent on economic access to education, location of residence and ethnicity. Besides education, however, the single largest disequalising factor in the society is the ratio of children to adults in a household.

**Keywords:** Pauline Audrey Knight; Inequality, Stratification, Macro-economic shock, Functionalism, Structuralism.