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## **Abstract**

This dissertation studies the effects of multi-dimensional poverty in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the most developed countries within the Caribbean region. Poverty is a global multifaceted social issue which entails having several definitions since the late 1970s. It looks closely at data relating to socialization and its relations to education attainment, economic opportunities, violence, health issues and mental illnesses between the years 2010 and 2020. It is important for many to understand the impact this social conundrum has on the poor to motivate better programs and policies in differing areas that are not only specific but accessible and effective. In the end, this paper shows how this issue is a cycle: everything is either a byproduct of poverty or factors that push a person into poverty.

**Keywords:** Trinidad and Tobago, multidimensional poverty, the poor, effects of poverty, violence and crime, malnourishment, mental illnesses

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# **Introduction**

## **Rationale**

Research found on Trinidad and Tobago focuses on monetary measures of poverty to ascertain who is poor. Therefore, this paper will add to the lack of non-monetary poverty-related documentations published on Trinidad and Tobago where this thesis will focus on the social, physical and psychological implications poverty had on many citizens. Although the country is considered developed compared to many of its counterparts within the Caribbean, poverty is still a significant social phenomenon that needs to be closely examined from all angles; this includes considering what citizens of Trinidad and Tobago knows about poverty to ascertain if stereotypes of the poverty and its relationship with the poor is a problem amongst the wider community. If they are knowledgeable about the various problems the poor face there can be inspiration for development practitioners and the government to consider implementing more accessible non-monetary programs to assist the vulnerable.

## **Parameters**

This dissertation is done based on the country of Trinidad and Tobago because the researcher is of this nationality and is interested in this country's socio-economic wellbeing. This paper takes a social standpoint that involves the study of children and parents (men and women) or guardians within households concerning their wellbeing. Because poverty can have effects that extend to the country, it was important to ask at least 100 citizens their thoughts and opinions on the implications of poverty and so were referenced throughout this paper. As a result of the gaps in data where

poverty rates are difficult to find on T&T, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report published in 2011 was the last significant paper published introducing a non-monetary measure of poverty comparing the country's stance to others around the world and is heavily referenced in more recent poverty studies. Thus this paper was inspired by the dimensions of poverty discussed in the Index, to formulate the structure of this thesis so as to show how interrelated factors influence poverty and vice versa and uses the time frame of 2010-2020 to look at recent available statistics provided on the country. The Central Statistical Office (CSO), is a section of the Ministry of Planning and Development who is in charge of the collection and analysis of data of Trinidad and Tobago, however there have been gaps in the provision of statistics on the country. Hence, references to research and studies by other countries are included to broaden the understanding of this topic, despite this paper's focus being Trinidad and Tobago.

## **Objectives**

The goal of this thesis is to determine the extent and characteristics of poverty on the poor within Trinidad and Tobago to understand their social and psychological struggles as well as the experiences that can be a determinant or the result of this conundrum. Additionally, it aims to provide an easy to read and understandable compilation of information for the public so that more action can be taken to assist those in need in varying areas of their deprivation.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

For this paper, there was the use of primary and secondary documentary sources in which secondary sources include: articles, reports and research papers done both nationally and internationally. There was searches specifically on the social, physical and psychological implications of poverty. For the primary research of this dissertation, questionnaires were administered online to one hundred citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as it provides a sample in which answers can be generalized due to varying responses (see Appendix A).

### **Data Utilization**

The data observed and used were all from literary studies including local and social studies to better understand the topic at hand. Using empirical research, this thesis is guided by data provided by past researchers making the body of work relatively qualitative with interpretations and reference to quantitative data in the form of statistics, figures and tables collected by the researcher's questionnaire. The figures used will allow for readers to have a better understanding of the information described throughout the paper.

## **Chapter Outline**

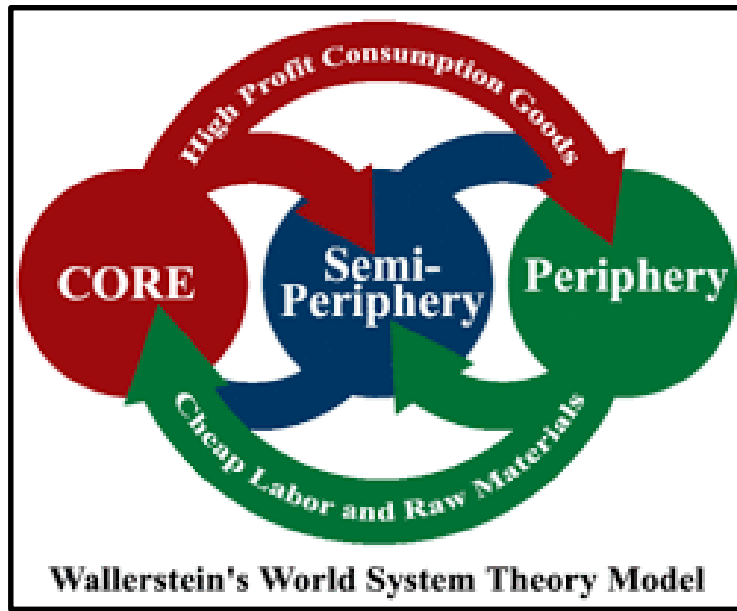
This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 sets the conceptual framework, serving as an introductory section that provides insight on poverty in the Caribbean gradually focusing on Trinidad and Tobago. In this chapter, brief insight to the history of poverty within the region and other factors that propels a Caribbean country into poverty are mentioned. More specifically, the economic standing of Trinidad and Tobago is discussed referencing the Multidimensional Poverty Index and concludes with a brief introduction to what will be discussed in the following chapters. In Chapter 2, there is the summary of findings from the questionnaire in which answers were included throughout this paper followed by Chapter 3, concentrating on data that looks specifically at the social effects of poverty on the poor. Here, this major category is broken down into education, unemployment as well as the behavior of those vulnerable. It shows how interrelated these influencers are. Chapter 3 explores health issues of the poor. Thereafter, Chapter 4 assesses the psychological impact of this phenomenon on the poor. This chapter shows how mental health is related to and affects the aforementioned.

## **Chapter 1: An Introduction to Poverty**

### **1.1 History of Dependency of the Caribbean Leading towards Economic Hardships**

Poverty is a worldwide social problem that has been plaguing many, and the Caribbean is no different. “Poverty can be defined as the condition where a person lacks the basic needs of food, clothing, adequate shelter, as well as access to key social and public services (eg. health and education) and where such paucities exist in a compromised state of social connectedness, safety, empowerment, opportunity, psychological wellbeing and happiness” (HEU-UWI, viii). Placed in simple words, poverty is more than lacking basic necessities but also involves experiencing hardships socially and psychologically where basic life experiences are impaired. Amongst the poor are some common characteristics that include but are not limited to large family size, low educational attainment, overcrowded households, water scarcity and a lack of sanitation facilities (Cambridge 12). All of which contributes to a damaged social, physical and mental well-being of a person.

The Caribbean is susceptible to a degree of economic and environmental vulnerability because of several influences. The factors that causes poverty within the region besides what was previously mentioned are “single parenting, health issues and largely the nature of the Caribbean economy (natural disasters impact on agriculture and tourism sector), unemployment and low pay, historical and political factors” (Chinapoo et al 394).



**Figure 1.1 The Marxist's Dependency Theory**

The historical dependency of the region on first world countries such as Europe and the US can be found through the trades, financing and preferential agreements between these countries and the Caribbean. According to a Key Sociologist, Marxist Frank, he saw a relationship between two large groupings for countries where the developed and rich are described as 'metropolises or core' while the underdeveloped or developing countries that depends on the first as 'satellites or periphery' (Chinapoo et al 314). He argues that there are close historical, economic, political and social ties that bind satellites to metropolises so that they are forced to be dependent on the latter. This means that the core countries develop and benefit from riches of the peripheries' labor and materials compared to them. The expropriation of the Caribbean's cocoa, tobacco, sugar cane, and coffee is an example of this where the region is still being affected. There is a connection between this theory to the plantation theory brought forward by regional economists where they further dissected what Marxist postulated. This theory highlights the issue of the monocrop culture that depends on the 'mother' country to gain revenue through exports as the region's climate is suitable

for the raw materials harvested. Persons such as Kari Levitt and Lloyd Best believed that this contributed to poverty within the Caribbean countries (Ramlal- Badoo slide 26). From there, there was the introduction of businesses from these developed countries, where Multinational Corporations (MNCs) provided job opportunities to local citizens to assist the countries economically. However, these MNCs had various disadvantages in the countries they were situated. They contributed to countries not receiving the amount of foreign revenues they believed they would have received because these corporations repatriated profits. They also forced several smaller businesses to close down due to stiff competition and tax avoidance (Fergie 46-49). Not only laborers received low wages but these MNCs were reluctant in sharing skills to their local employees so that only workers from the headquarters were skillful resulting in an abundance of unskilled workers unemployed within their respective fields after the corporation left. All of this can be seen till this day where several Caribbean countries depend on the larger countries for imports where revenue earned is not efficient and there is the steady decrease in natural resources.

## 1.2 Implications of the Caribbean's Economy and Poverty

Several Caribbean countries depend on tourism and agriculture to increase their Gross Domestic Products (GDP) which generates foreign revenue and provides job opportunities (Cannonier and Burke par 16). However, they are prone to long term disadvantages of economic declines through natural disasters, disputes between countries and other unexpected circumstances. Natural disasters stifle economic growth, decrease fiscal flexibility, and exacerbate debt, continuing the region's vicious cycle of high debt and low growth. (Muñoz and Ötker par 4) The Caribbean faces natural disasters including hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, landslides and storms which all contribute to implications on the economy. In the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, for some countries like Dominica when struck with hurricane Maria, damages amounting to “226 percent of GDP” go beyond expectations and thus propels the economy into a shock where it would take at least 5 years to recover to pre-hurricane levels. However, in countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname where it is commodities- based, events such as pandemics are detrimental to the trades. “Oil and natural-gas prices especially affect Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, and gold prices impact both Suriname and Guyana” (Coley-Graham par 5). According to the Humanitarian Response Organization, it is said that the heavily dependent energy sector of T&T is vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil and gas prices where exports make up 85% of total export earnings, 40% of government revenue and more than 35% of GDP (qtd.in par 3). The poor performance of oil and natural gas in recent years contributed to a long recession from which the country was just emerging out of when the COVID-19 issue arose, causing GDP to fall by -7.8% in 2020 (par 2). Although the republic of Trinidad and Tobago is classified as a high income country by the World Bank, the nation's main source of income has decreased in amount with fluctuations of oil prices. “Arguably, it is not so much that

resources are a problem, but rather the difficulty lies in the allocation and use of resources generated from oil and gas” (Kedir and Sookram 522). From 1993 to 2021, Trinidad and Tobago's crude oil production averaged 102.37 barrels per day (BBL/D/1K), with a top of 155.68 BBL/D/1K in March 2005 and a low of 51.21 BBL/D/1K in May 2020 (Trading Economics) The prices of these oil barrels in 2010 fluctuated between \$473.95 to \$573.62 BBL/D/1K while in 2020 the lowest price being \$141.97 and \$416.41 the highest in January showing the decrease in oil prices. (Index Mundi)

### 1.3 The Poor and Vulnerable

Within the Caribbean, those considered poor tend to be the “unemployed, underemployed, those on fixed income (pensioners), those in the Agricultural sector, women, children and the physically challenged” (Society slide 7). These persons can be placed in three broad categories; “the traditional poor, the new poor and the poverty line poor” (Cambridge 15). The traditional poor are concerned with persons such as ex-prisoners and adolescent girls who live in unsupported environments and are involved in child bearing, the new poor are those that had a satisfactory level of living however due to economic downturns are unable to continue living their previous lifestyles and lastly, the poverty line poor are those that are barely staying above the poverty line due to difficult situations however the basic needs of the households are met (qtd. in Cambridge 15). Sociologists Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree in their studies in 1889- 1901, saw that those that live under the poverty line should be considered to be living in absolute poverty. “The terms ‘absolute’ and ‘subsistence’ poverty refer to a situation in which individuals lack essentials to sustain life- basic human needs for food, shelter and clothing” while relative poverty is concerned with individuals, families and groups that do not fit in with the standard the societies they belong to according to Peter Townsend. He postulated that poverty is not only economic but also a social issue which includes not being able to access certain foods, participate in activities and have the amenities encouraged by the society (Chinapoo et al 378-379). Relative poverty is more widespread but does not have extreme impacts on citizens compared to the poor living in absolute poverty. In a 2015 report done by the United Nations (UN), it was noted that more than 700 million people across the world live in extreme poverty. The international poverty line was defined as an income of US \$1.90 per day, a figure stipulated by the World Bank and thus incomes below that categorizes people as living in extreme/ absolute poverty (Central Statistical office par 1).

Although the region has made significant socio-economic progress since the 1960s, poverty levels remain relatively high. From the 1990s there were a series of surveys taken to determine the extent of this social phenomenon (Downes 4). In Trinidad and Tobago in 1992, with the determinant of the poverty line income being \$2,420 there was an incidence of 11% from individuals, in 1997 11.2% and in 2005 a decrease to 8.3%. Those living under the poverty line in 1992 were 21% and in 2007, 17% (Society- Social Problems slide 4). In 2019 the minimum hourly rate rose from \$15 to \$17.50 totaling to \$3033.33 as the average monthly income (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago par 2). This increase along with low inflation rates can benefit the poor to an extent. In Trinidad and Tobago, the inflation rate in 2010 was 10.53% declining to 5.1% in 2011 to a 4.1% increase to 9.1% in 2012. From that figure, there was a steady decline in inflation reaching 0.6% in 2020. However, if income earned by the poor are lower than the minimum wage, there will be an increase of deprivation for many.

## 1.4. An Introduction of Trinidad and Tobago

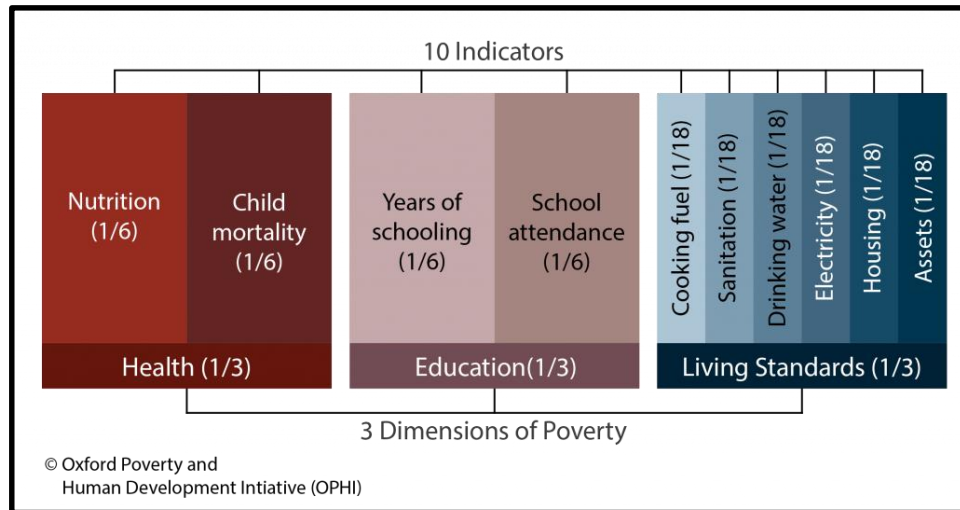


**Figure 1.2- Map of Trinidad and Tobago.**

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) is a dual island country where the bigger island, Trinidad, is approximately 115 square miles while the smaller island is around 19, housing a population size 1.399 million as of 2020. These islands are situated in the southern part of the Caribbean near Venezuela and are known for being one of the first Caribbean countries to become independent. After Jamaica's independence on August 6th 1962, T&T's was on August 31st that same year influencing other islands to seek their freedom from colonial relations. While Trinidad is famous for its annual carnival, party and fetes, Tobago is the home of vacationing. There the island is surrounded by tourist attractions from beaches to waterfalls, including rich heritage and a more peaceful aura compared to the bigger island. The country's main natural source of revenue is its

oil and gas accounting for 80% of exports followed by smaller numbers in export of ammonia, alcohols, iron, fertilizers, iron and steel (Trading Economics). Nonetheless, the country's natural resources are depleting and has in the past contributed to economic hardships within the islands thus leading to many that are poor to suffer the brunt of bad management of exports and imports. As a result of colonization by various bigger countries, there was the amalgamation of races, culture and even ethnicities consequently providing prominent evidence through the country's creole spoken by many and patois by much less in small communities. These islands are home to mostly Africans and Indians with fewer numbers of East Asians, Caucasians and Middle Easterners however their influence in culture can still be noticed. This country also houses several migrants from varying races and ethnicities thus making some of them unemployed and prone to low levels of educational attainment making them more likely to become poor. Due to the lack of provided and updated data, the latest report on area with high poverty rate was reported to be Sangre Grande consisting of the most poor persons per 100 in the national population with 39.1 % of the its population deemed to be living under the poverty line and has one of the highest unemployment rates among 18-29 year olds in the country with over 28% unemployed (qtd. In Daily Express part 2). While there are certain areas that have high rates of poverty, the insight to its impacts on the poor's wellbeing is important.

## 1.5 Multidimensional Poverty Measure in Trinidad and Tobago



**Figure 1.3- Three Dimensions of Multidimensional Poverty**

Poverty has traditionally been thought of as a monetary notion, and it has been measured primarily using the income/expenditure method which places a “numerical value on the poor by constructing a poverty line that distinguishes the poor from the total population and determines the threshold or cut-off value through approaches such as budget standards and expenditure patterns. This technique classifies the poor as those who fall short by a certain distance from the average or median income of the entire population” (qtd. in Moonalsigh et al 58). Poverty and the monetary measures used to collect information are problematic because figures alter through time and geographical location necessitating different analysis. The poverty data for most Caribbean countries have been collected through the Country Poverty Assessments (CPAs) sponsored by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The measures of incidence of poverty are usually involved in those surveys considering individuals living under the poverty line, the poverty gap and the severity of the poverty amongst the poor. However, the downside of only using monetary measures

of poverty, is that this being a multifaceted socio-economic problem only determines who are income poor, it does not consider those that are deprived in other areas of their life. Therefore, there was the introduction of a measure that considers areas that can influence poverty and affect those living in it.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was established in the 2010 Human Development Report, and it detects multiple overlapping deprivation experienced by individuals in three dimensions: health, education, and standard of living. All of the indicators used to calculate a country's MPI come from the same household survey. The variables are weighted to produce a deprivation score, which is calculated for each participant in the survey. “To differentiate between the poor and the non-poor, a deprivation score of 33.3 percent (one-third of the weighted indicators) is employed and thus people are classified as multidimensional poor if the deprivation score is 33.3 percent or above” (The Next Frontier 6). It was estimated in a 2011 survey based on the MPI that about “0.6 percent of the population are multidimensional poor while an additional 3.7 percent are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty” (Human Development Report 6). Through this it is easier to create alleviation plans and assistance against social deprivation for those living in and with these conditions so as to shape a better way of life for them.

In Trinidad and Tobago there are a number of social welfare programs that are offered to assist those in need through the provision of safety of homes and other social assistance. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is one of the main ministries that do so allotting for many provision of help such as to help with food deprivation through food stamps/ hampers, School Feeding Programs, in education being free with Adult Literacy Association (ALTA) to help with education, Youth Training and Employment Partnership Program (YTEPP) and many other forms of assistance also provided by non- profit organizations such as the Living Waters

Community and Habitat for Humanity. The efforts of the Government span several Ministries with The National Family Services Division main goal is to promote healthy family functioning through the provision of preventive, developmental and remedial programs and services (Cox 7).

## **Chapter 2: Key Findings in Questionnaire**

The researcher asked 100 volunteers about their knowledge on poverty and its implications on the poor. From this, 38% of the responders were from the age group of 22- 27year olds followed by 27% being from 16-21 years with more than half being employees (52%) and 33% being students. The questionnaire showed that the total percentage of 65.8% of participants make a monthly salary of \$4000 and over and just 34.3% making less than \$4000, which is a few dollars over the minimum monthly wage of T&T of \$3033.33 (See Appendix B). From this, the researcher had a better understanding of the participants' background and considered how it may have influenced their answers.

**Table 2.1: Respondents' Description of Poverty**

“Firstly poverty is a very complex term as it has more than one definition but the most common definition of poverty is not being able to access basic essentials such as food and healthcare.”

“Inability to access basic needs like water, food and shelter but also inability to access emerging social needs like outings and entertainment as this prevents networking but also deprives someone of social inclusion and socializing.”

“A hellish dark hole formed by capitalism where escape is glorified yet improbable if not impossible to achieve.”

“To me, it's the inability to enjoy a comfortable living standard. Illiteracy, living in remote areas, crime and gang activities, observing traditional culture and lack of exposure to opportunities such as education, traveling abroad and education in T&T usually makes up this population.”

“As a glass door where opportunities are out of reach. Opportunities for employment, school, stability. Poverty is a disease that's often chronic, so hard to get out of, sometimes the stars align and some are able but for others they can only stand behind the glass door.”

“A plague society has yet to eradicate.”

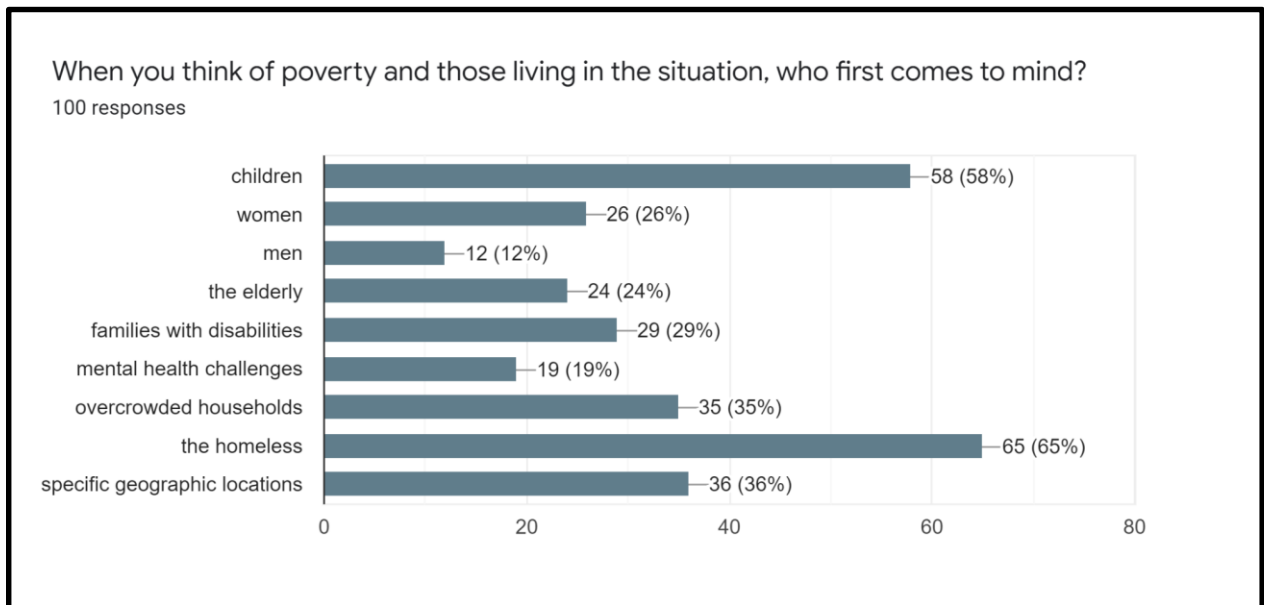
“The perpetual lack of resources essential to human life e.g food & water that diminishes one's quality of life.”

“Those living under poverty. It's an injustice brought about by contemporary capitalism and history.”

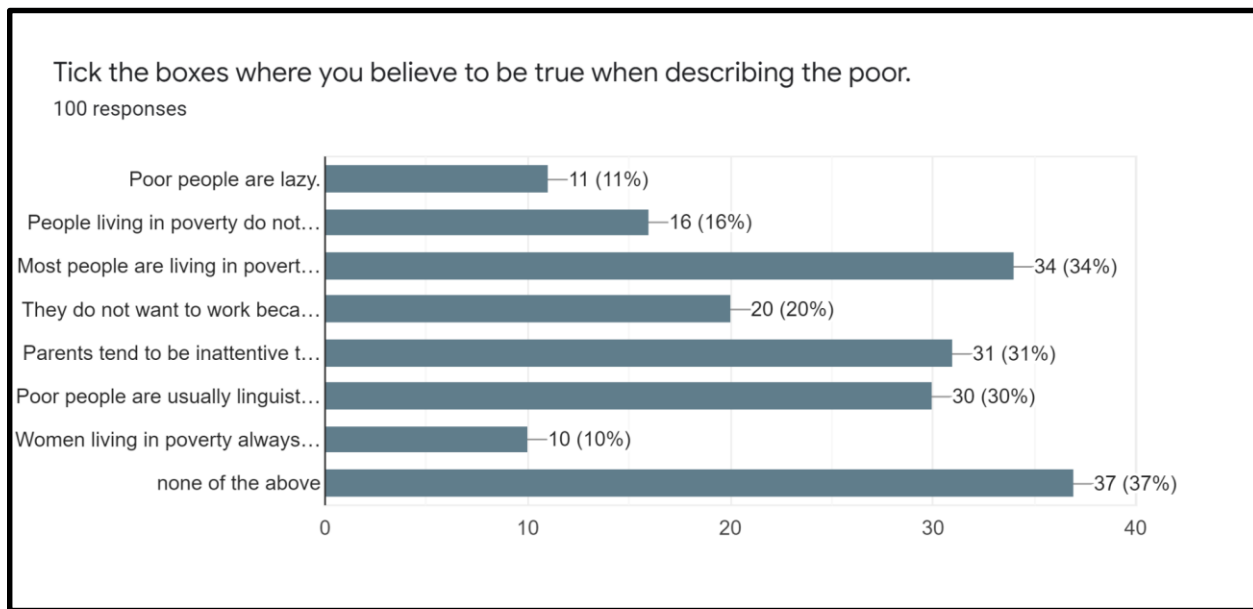
It was found that the majority of the results described poverty as the inability to afford basic necessities such as food, water and shelter with very few mentioning social factors that are involved such as social exclusion and the inequalities suffered by the poor (see table 2.1). This

makes up for 65% of the respondents first thinking of the homeless when asked about persons living in poverty, closely followed by children chosen by 58% of the participants (see table 2.2). Although that was the results, 95% of the participants acknowledged that there are different types of poverty with 89% saying yes to there being varying effects and degrees to its implication on the poor whether emotionally, financially and or mentally as some persons can be temporarily or inter-generationally living in poverty (see Appendix C 2.1).

**Table 2.2: Thoughts on Who Are Considered the Most Vulnerable Living in Poverty.**



**Table 2.3: Responses to Stereotypes of People Living in Poverty.**

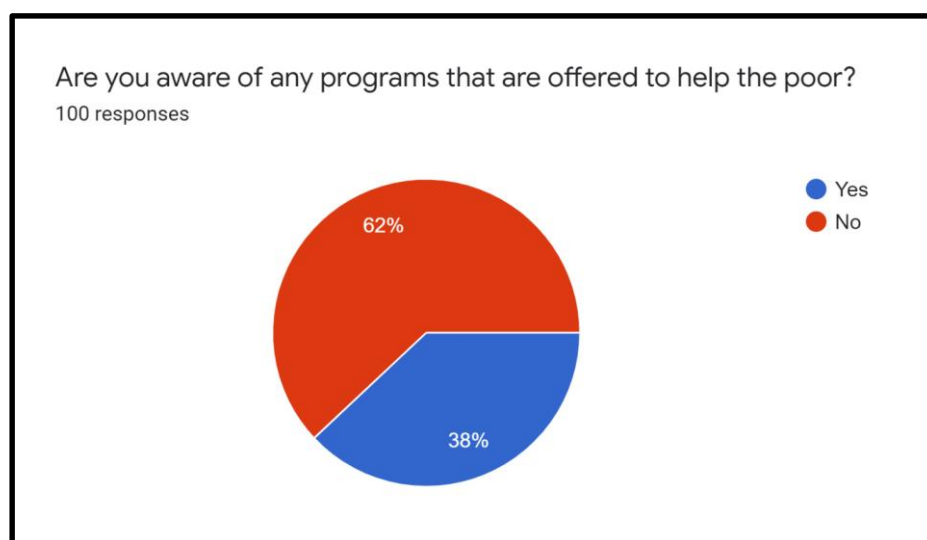


The most prominent stereotype about poor people is that they are poor as a result of substance abuse which is just 3% less than the amount of responders answering with none of the above (see table 2.3). This challenges the information of 54% of people believing that poverty has an economic history within the country (see Appendix D) and various types of poverty having different effects on people.

Majority of the responses stated that women and children suffer more than men in poverty (See Appendix E). The reason replied by many was that women have excess expenses that involve taking care of the children due to their dependencies and sanitary products for their menstruations as well as being susceptible to being marginalized. Despite this, a few answered that “suffering is still suffering” and that men suffer the same frustration and stress as women but in a different way.

In appendix F, several participants believed that as a result of frustration and desperation, many of

the poor turn towards crime and violence to “make a quick dollar” due to their deprivations and desperation to survive.



**Figure 2.4: Awareness of Programs to Help the Poor**

The last question referred to participants’ awareness of existing programs offered in Trinidad and Tobago to help the needy. Only 38% answered yes, giving rise to responses consisting of programs that target various sectors in society with drives by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Service as well as other facilities and centers (see Appendix G). One respondent answered that “corruption of these programs by some have impaired the efficiency and effectiveness” thus resulting in many persons not having access or regular access to these forms of assistance.

From the information collected, it was found that some of the participants have a surface understanding of poverty and thus the following chapters will provide a deeper insight to the social phenomenon for interested persons.

## Chapter 3: The Social Ramifications of Poverty on the Poor in Society

### 3.1 The Cycle of Education and Unemployment

**Table 3.4: Responses to Experiences of the Poor**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Poor people suffer from mental illness and aren't aware.	17	32	37	12	6
Lack of sufficient education causes people to become poor.	9	33	25	28	8
It is easy to get out of poverty.	1	4	19	42	37
Poverty is a result of lack of readiness of the government to allocate sufficient resources to help needy people.	7	37	36	17	6
Poor people are regularly discriminated against.	34	43	18	3	2
Women and children living in poverty tend to be victims of abuse.	29	50	18	3	0
Female headed households tend to struggle financially more than male headed households.	15	25	38	15	10
Poor people suffer the consequences of socioeconomic inequalities the most.	36	48	13	2	3
	29	41	22	7	3

People living in poverty have higher risks of contracting diseases.					
People living in poverty tend to join gangs and partake in drug use.	20	45	23	10	5

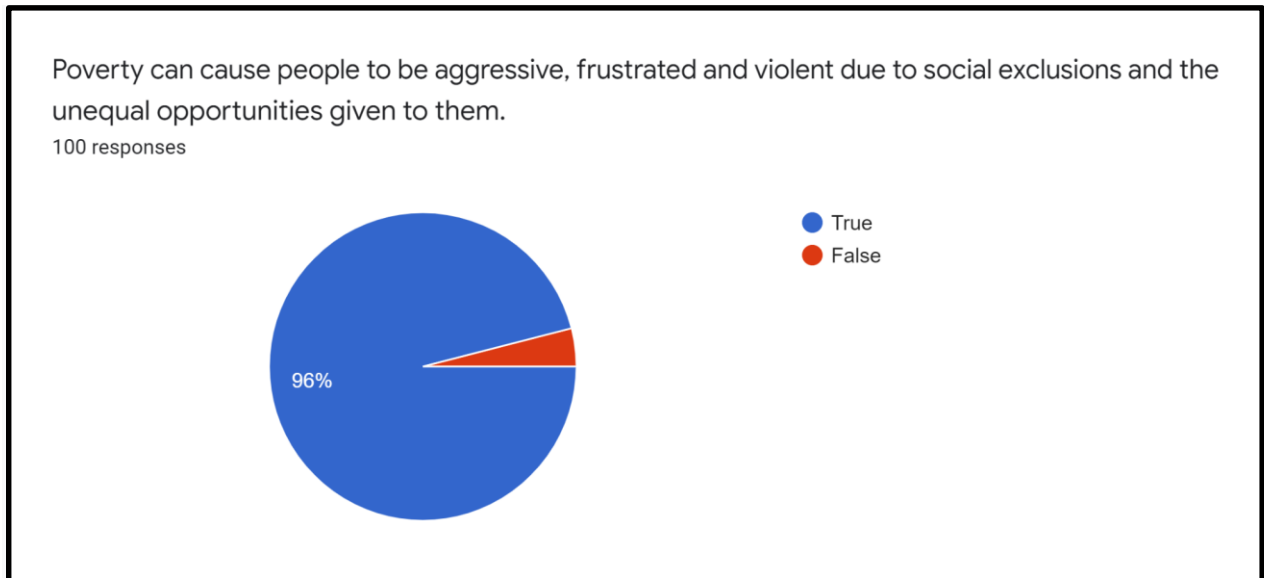
Many people living in poverty suffer as factors that influence or heighten their situation are interrelated and can affect another in a rippling effect. According to a participant of the researcher’s questionnaire, poverty is an issue that cannot be easily overcome. Poverty is, “a glass door where opportunities are out of reach. Opportunities for employment, school, stability. Poverty is a disease that's often chronic, so hard to get out of, sometimes the stars align and some are able but for others they can only stand behind the glass door” (see table 2.1). Education achievement and unemployment are factors that push many to become deprived in one or more areas including socially leading to physical and psychological complications. Education, being one of the major factors noted in the MPI, influences a person’s status and social mobility in society and poses a threat to the vulnerable. According to Engle and Black, children raised in low-income families are at risk for academic and social problems as well as poor health and wellbeing, which can then undermine educational achievements (2). It was found that 30% of respondents believed that those living in poverty tend to be linguistically challenged (see table 3.4). Children coming from impoverished families tend to struggle in learning, communicating, understanding as well as concentrating. It was found that these children’s implications in this sector can be linked to improper nutrition which helps the brain to develop fully and allow for better concentration and absorption of information. These children struggle in these areas as their parents are not linguistically inclined as well. Family is the first form of socialization as parents/ guardians “aid

in the creation and maintenance of order and stability in society” (Chinapoo et al, 158). Considering this, poverty can be a temporary experience but also a generational one where children living in poverty grow up to be parents reproducing within the impoverish circumstances continuing the cycle of poverty. If the parents have a low level of education, then the areas they lack in can be passed on as they do not know better. This leads to generational poverty as some parents living in these areas are not aware of the importance of education. As a result, many of these people work at menial jobs that pay minimum wage which lessens their ability to get out of poverty.

Despite this, human development within the country has progressed over time, and this is reflected in increased access to free educational and health services. In Trinidad and Tobago, education is one of the top priorities where the government believes that education can help alleviate poverty where Government Assistance for Tertiary Expenses (GATE) are available for those wanting to further their studies at the tertiary level. The provision of government and government assisted schools allows for every citizen despite their financial standing to aim to achieve a certain standard of education. This includes an abundance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) schools located around the country. This constitutes for the 98.7% literacy rate (MacroTrends). However, this figure does not indicate level of education attainment and truancy or students who have failed to be placed after SEA and lack of CXC subjects. According to the 2011 Population and Housing Consensus, the number of children between 5-16 years that are not in school is approximately 3.77% while ages 17-18 equals a high of 15.89%. Within this same consensus, it is noted that 62.88% of the population has a secondary school education which shows that educational attainment may not be the problem but the level at which many achieve up to.

Unemployment has a direct link to poverty and may be influenced by academic attainment or crime and violence. Many children that are poor are prone to drop out of school to help their family with making money in places that are unsuitable to them and exploitative. “No matter where they are, children who grow up impoverished suffer from poor living standards, develop fewer skills for the workforce, and earn lower wages as adults” (UNICEF). In Trinidad and Tobago, the unemployment rate in 2010 was 4.03%, in 2011 the rate declined to 3.43%, in 2020 percentages was approximately 6.74% a 3.46% increase from 2019 with 2.43% in 2015 being the lowest within the last 10 years (O’Neil). Economic setbacks of the country due to oil and gas prices and other economic factors makes it even more difficult for the poor to close the financial gap between them and the wider community as the government tends to extend the hardships to foods in which the poor already had problems obtaining regularly. Due to this, as well as discrimination being a contributing factor that promotes social exclusions many persons turn to crime and violence.

### 3.2 Social Exclusion Can Lead to Crime



**Figure 3.5: Responses to the Connection between Reaction to Social Exclusion and Unequal Opportunities.**

It was found that 63% of the participants believed that poverty can be considered an experience (see Appendix C fig. C.3) In fact it hinders health, social capabilities such as social belonging, cultural identity, core values and education (Engle and Black, 1). In figure 3.5, more than three quarter of the respondents saw a connection between social exclusion and aggression. Poverty causes and is a consequence of discrimination and social exclusion which can result in social outburst or what many consider delinquency. As a consequence of the lack of power and opportunities, many needy people are often overlooked and exploited. This leads to them not being able to partake in society as regularly with the same acceptance as others leading to a breakdown of social relations with the wider community. According to Chinapoo et al, this can be frustrating as members of the wider community may see them as failures which can lead to the poor joining gangs and partaking in delinquency to feel a sense of belonging and equality (341).

Although poverty is oftentimes associated with crime due to the prevalence of the poor living in slums and partaking in criminal activities, one cannot exclusively relate both social problems because crime is committed by anyone. What poverty does is decrease the access to satisfaction of needs of the poor. Crime is more of a problem that pushes already marginalized people to conduct illegal ways to balance their increasing gap of inequalities between them and society. This is done by those that are desperate and even angry of not being heard and seen. This comprises but are not limited to theft and robbery which are often executed with the use of force and threats which can give rise to more adverse crimes that includes violence like murder and rape (Taylor par 3).

This social issue is also correlated to stress and misery which causes many parents to have impaired parenting practices. Several researchers at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recognized that “parents living in poverty tend to use strenuous disciplinary techniques whenever they feel overwhelmed and fall short on being able to provide an optimal home” (Kids Matter par 5) This is not only done to children but to the women within the household. UNICEF stated that “around the world, simply being born to a certain family, of a particular race or ethnicity or even gender can influence how much one will struggle through poverty” (1). The rate of intimate partner violence against women and girls are directly linked to multidimensional poverty (HDR 19). Domestic abuse on women and even children is sometimes so complex that it is difficult for women to leave the relationship safely, making them have a higher probability of losing their jobs and earnings. A child’s ability to emotionally and behaviorally adjust is said to be open to becoming damaged when exposed to verbal conflict and violence between parents for an extended time leading to depression, anxiety and difficulty in making social relations (qtd. in Raver et al par 2). This also leads to a reaction of juvenile delinquency where children tend to search for groups that can fill the gap their parents cannot. This usually results in gangs that disrupt the natural flow of society.

To ease the frustration of living in poverty, many poor people may use alcohol and other substances (Fell and Hewstone par 11). This can also be a factor that influences the aggression and violence on the vulnerable within the family. In a report done by Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Donna Cox reported that cases of violence against women have almost doubled since 2019. In that year figures were 232 increasing to 556 in 2020 and 826 in 2021 in a comparative study from January to March (3).

Although it has not been often spoken about, men are also victims to poverty. It was found that only 12% of participants thought of men when they thought of persons living in poverty (see table 2.2) as many respondents saw that women and children tend to be marginalized more in society despite support that targets them (see Appendix E). It has been reported that in most poor households, the absence of father figures leads to a lack of male role models for the younger generation. This is also sometimes due to jail/ prison time for a number of reasons which can be connected to young males with absent fathers making them open to criminal records and consequently difficulty in becoming employed. It was also reported that children living in poverty oftentimes uses substances to cope and have higher risks of becoming homeless leading to a cycle of poverty due to “perceived abandonment, attachment issues, abuse and criminal/ delinquency involvement (qtd in Brown par 5-6) According to writer McLaughlin, crime is frequently committed against single parent households headed by females as they are easy targets, teen mothers victimized by their boyfriends and against poor residents due to it requiring less skills and not just done by the poor on the non-poor. From the Trinidad and Tobago Central Registry on Domestic Violence out of 7, 594 reports, more than 75% of these reports were from women. In 2019, 81% of the reports were women with 22.5% being between 18 to 29 years of age and 48.5% between the ages of 30 and 49 (Cox 3).

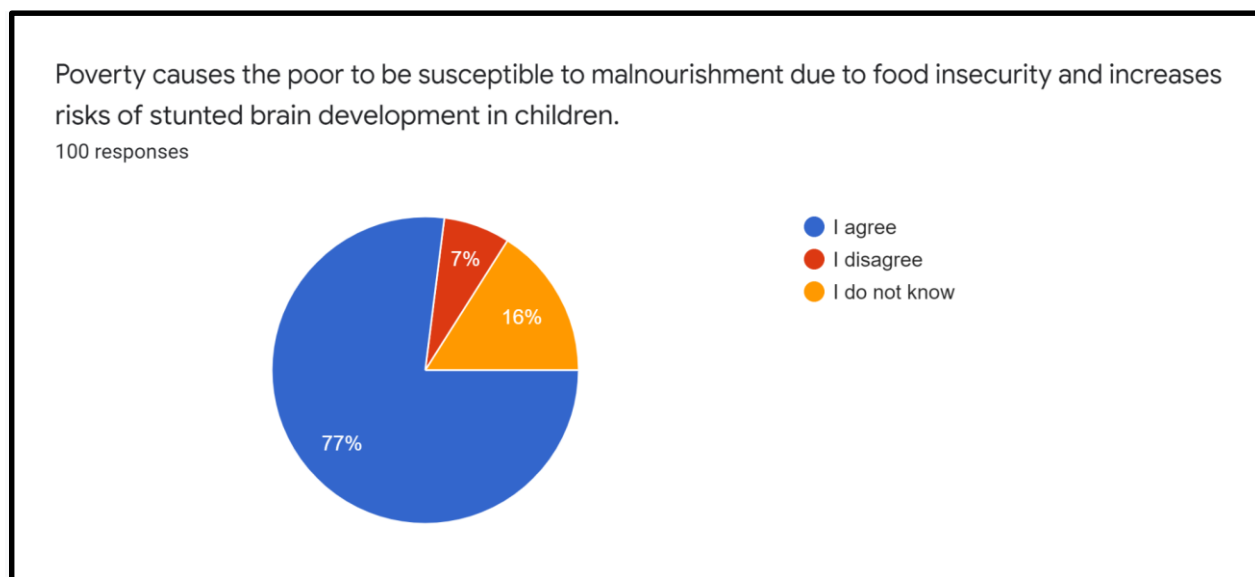
“Beyond the direct effects of poverty on victims, crime and violence inflict widespread costs, generating a climate of fear for all citizens and diminishing economic growth” (Kambon and Henderson 1). Crime not only creates fear and unsafety on the poor but also in the wider community. According to Jonathon et al, crime hinders a country’s economic gains as investors would be discouraged from entering the country’s markets as well as forces governments to repair various types of crime-related damages, the loss of revenue used to maintain and rehabilitate prisons, and the resources spent to arrest, investigate, and prosecute criminals (qtd. in 76-77). Thus it is important for citizens and governments seeing how multifaceted poverty and contributing factors are.

## **Chapter 4: Physical Health Implications of the Vulnerable Living in Poverty**

Many researchers found that women living in poverty tend to have a lot of children for several social, cultural, economic and religious reasons. It was said that it can be linked to limited access to education, contraceptives and family planning knowledge, infant mortality rates amongst the poor that pushes women to reproduce in case any children die, women needing extra hands for assistance in obtaining money to help the family as well as some communities believing that children are blessings in which religion may play a role (Noakes). Despite there being free health care and free education with a high literacy rate amongst the population in Trinidad and Tobago, the prevalence of teen pregnancies was linked to some of the reasons above. It was found that there is a connection between dropouts from school to higher teen pregnancies. From a study performed by the University of the West Indies, it was indicated that “by age 19, more than a thousand young women had already given birth to four children. The impact of teenage pregnancy is also compounded by the fact that 22.5 percent of that grouping of young people had been classified as unskilled” (Richards et al. 108). This means that a percentage of teens engaging in intercourse at a young age do so without protection which can lead to sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs and STIs). This can also be a cause of rape as they are “weak” and easy to assault. The unfavorable living conditions of the poor where there are bad sanitary environments increases the risks of sickness and diseases among those living in the household and makes them more vulnerable and open to premature mortality (Water Aid par 1). All of this plays a role in infant mortality rates as well as malnourishment due to food insecurities amongst the poor.

Food insecurity, the irregular ability to obtain proper meals has detrimental impacts on children and women especially those who are pregnant. According to, *Child and Family Poverty in Ontario*, food insecurity hinders the physical development of children in most cases involving primarily the

five senses; hearing, poor eyesight, speech and or mobility issues (16). “In one in six multidimensional poor people, across 100 countries it was declared that 207 million live in female-headed households making women and children open to any socio-economic and physical drawbacks” (HDR 18). Poverty influencing the diets of the poor has a variety of factors associated with increased neonatal and post-neonatal mortality rates, greater risks of injuries resulting from accidents or physical abuse and or neglect, higher risks of asthma and lower development across multiple ages (Aber et al 263). It was found that neonatal and post-neonatal mortality rates have a higher chance of relating to parental education level which is correlated to pregnancy age and experience and hospitalization, giving rise to low birth weights (LBW) incidence (Aber et al 472). These children who live past their first few years are in danger of developing “neurological deficits, minor neurological abnormalities, low language comprehension skills and visual recognition acuity,” making them open to struggling not only physically but also socially (473).



**Figure 4.6. Responses on the Relation between Malnourishment and Development Issues**

Malnutrition is common amid the poor and can be connected to food insecurity. Chronic "malnutrition" is insufficient food intake that fails to meet energy needs that are necessary to maintain healthy organs and tissues. "Malnutrition is caused by an insufficient, imbalanced, or excessive intake of macronutrients and/or micronutrients, as well as health-related variables that interfere with the body's absorption of these nutrients and involves child stunting and even obesity" (Newsday par 4-5). 77% of the respondents saw that malnourishment as a result from food insecurity creates a higher risk of stunted brain development in children (see fig. 4.6). The brain is an important and active organ that requires high surges of energy from food daily and when the brain cannot, it will slow down in its development which can cause implications on the health of the person if not sustained over a period of time. In infants the brain takes up 87% of their daily energy with children between the ages of 6-12 years, using 30 – 45% (Health Engine). Since children are still in the process of growing, malnourishment tends to affect them the most as their brain is not developed compared to their healthier peers. It was found that under nutrition and junk food are related to this problem. Some researchers have found a direct connection between food intake and the way the body functions. Health Engine also stated that due to the lack of energy, the brain might force the body to shut down to preserve energy which interferes "with sleeping patterns and mood affecting the day to day functioning of their brain" (par 11). They stated that "nutrients are hypothesized to act as a "trigger" for various brain development processes, without which development is hampered and brain physiology and structure are compromised." If critical nutrients are just temporarily unavailable, this impairment can be transient. It was estimated that in 2016 there were 100,000 people who were undernourished with nearly 30% considered to be living in poverty (Elder par 1). However, in Trinidad and Tobago due the country's status of being the most food wasteful country per capita by The World bank, there were businesses that have

succeeded in declining food waste. According to the food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N, T&T was able to do so as a result of increases in protein supplies. Businesses that feed the poor and those that have left over food have joined together to assist in mitigating hunger which they saw was linked to poverty (qtd. in Elder par 4). This accounts for the decline of percentage to 6.7% of the population being undernourished in 2019 according to the World Bank.

## **Chapter 5: The Psychological Wellbeing of the Poor**

Poverty has been thought of as having several negative psychological implications on the poor for a number of reasons. Parents/ guardians who become pressured and stressed because of financial difficulties tend to become “depressed and demoralized, which relates to marital conflict and disruptions in skillful parenting” (Conger et al 526). Consequently, children experiencing these behaviors tend to also become depressed and frustrated, as they are usually forced to grow up faster than their counterparts due to parents working late at night tending to double shifts or even multiple jobs (Librarian par 3). The lack of parent- child relationship as a result often produces negative feelings especially when the offspring are not at the age to properly understand the situation. “Some children feel deprived, embarrassed, bullied, inadequate and responsible” (qtd. in Child and Poverty 23). In fact, poverty over an extended period of time can also lead to “anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, psychological distress and even suicidal thoughts” (Simon et al par 4). Non-poor children who were perceived to take things for granted, ridiculed poor kids about what they ate and how they dressed, and bullied poor kids at school furthered emotions of feeling unloved leading to low self-esteem and confidence. These were considered to cause a poor person to injure himself or others, drinking poison, stealing from others, drug dealing, abusing children, or becoming angry and jealous (Theodore et al 30). This social phenomenon amplifies the difficulties faced by the poor and is more impactful on younger victims as they are not equipped to handle the challenges, stress and trauma.

### **Table 5.5 Thoughts on the Emotional Well-Being of the Poor**

**“Some people are content and make do with what they have and live happily while others lead unhappy, sad lives.”**

**“A 70-something year old man whose childhood was affected by severe poverty told me that while he remembers it fondly, his brother remembers it with bitterness. Same household, different perspective.”**

**“It depends, I have seen unstable individuals, depressed, angry, sad but I have also seen some full of zest for life, optimistic, contented.”**

**“According to the extent of poverty, it can range from normal to distressed.”**

**“Some persons living in poverty generally want to do better and are motivated to get out of their situation. On the other hand, there are those who are not particularly comfortable but they more or less have accepted where they are and don’t want to move forward.”**

**“A range from content to wishful.”**

**“Fragile, volatile and insecure etc.”**

**“Stressed and worried”**

Research has shown the prevalence of depression and anxiety amongst the poor and can be mitigated when socialized with others that can help ease the mind, however many people living in poverty tend to socialize with people of their social status leading to limited support as their peers live in similar circumstances (Fell and Hewstone par 10). Whilst happiness is not an emotion felt by many of the poor, there were reports of poor persons having a sense of fulfillment. According to some respondents, depending on a person's mindset, those living in poverty can be content with

their situation while others stated that they think the poor feel frustrated and depressed (see table 5). Coming from different financial backgrounds, it was found that poorer people reported higher levels of meaning in their lives with 66% of people in wealthy nations reported meaningful lives and a notable 95% were from impoverished countries (Sharew par 3-4). It depends on the type of poverty and in which area/s one is deprived in that determines a person's mindset, psychological wellbeing and behavior.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the aforementioned information, the most common definition of poverty discusses material deprivation due to the inaccessibility of water, food and shelter. However, research showed that it is also an experience that involves many contributing factors that pushes a person into poverty and has varying effects on a person. A history of dependency and exploitation of not only people but profits and resources within the Caribbean made poverty a problem still suffered today. In this dissertation, the Multidimensional Poverty Index was used as a basis to understand the social, physical and psychological wellbeing of the poor with aims to add to the lack of non-monetary poverty documents of this country. This paper showed how social exclusion as consequence of, or a causal effect on education attainment and employment as well as malnourishment and mental illness are some implications of poverty experienced and were associated with overcrowded households, bad sanitations, compromised relationships, violence and crime as well as impaired social interactions with the wider community.

Whilst the hundred participants of the questionnaire have a general understanding of poverty and its implications, there was a need for this paper to show the depth of poverty from this angle. It shows how difficult it is to fully eradicate poverty as it is interlinked with various factors.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Questionnaire Transcript

#### Poverty and Its Implications

Hi, I am a current third year student of The University of the West Indies, St Augustine and this questionnaire serves as a source of knowledge determining how much, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago knows about poverty and its implications on the poor. I ask that you read and answer each question carefully as your anonymous responses will help me with my thesis' grade.

---

#### \*Required

1. How old are you? \*

- 16-21
- 22-27
- 28-33
- 34-39
- 40-45
- 46-51
- 52-57
- 58 and over

2. What part of Trinidad and Tobago are you from? \*

---

3. What is your occupation? \*

- Student
- Employee
- Self-employed
- Employer
- Out of work and searching
- Out of work and not searching

4. If you are employed, what is your monthly income?

- Less than \$1,000 a month
- \$1,000-\$2,500 a month
- \$2,500- \$4,000 a month
- \$4,000- \$5,500 a month
- \$5,500- \$7,00 a month
- \$7,000- \$8,500 a month
- \$10,000 a month and over

5. How would you describe your financial life? \*

- I am financially independent and struggling
- I am financially independent and surviving
- I am financially independent and stable
- I am financially dependent and struggling to make ends meet
- I am financially dependent and surviving
- I am financially dependent and stable

6. How would you describe poverty? \*

---

7. Do you think that poverty can be considered an experience? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

8. When you think of poverty and those living in the situation, who first comes to mind? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Children
- Women
- Men
- The elderly
- Families with disabilities
- Mental health challenges
- Overcrowded households
- Specific geographic locations

9. Can poverty be connected to the economic past of Trinidad and Tobago? \*

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

10. Tick the boxes where you believe to be true when describing the poor. \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Poor people are lazy.
- People living in poverty do not value education.
- Most people are living poverty as a result of substance abuse
- They do not want to work because of access to government assistance
- Parents tend to be inattentive towards their children
- Poor people are usually linguistically challenged/ have limited vocabulary.
- Women living in poverty always have many children because they are bored
- None of the above

11. There are different types of poverty. \*

- True
- False

12. Do you think that poverty affects people in different ways and has various degrees to its implication? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

13. If your answer is yes or Maybe, please give a reason for your answer.

---

14. Do you think women and children suffer more than men living in poverty? Give a reason for your answer. \*

---

---

15. Poverty causes the poor to be susceptible to malnourishment due to food insecurity and increases risks of stunted brain development in children. \*

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

16. Those living in poverty usually show signs of aggression, learning issues and even adverse behavioural problems because of development issues due to undernourishment. \*

- True
- False
- To an extent

17. How would you describe the emotional state of people living in poverty? \*

---

18. Do you think some poor people can be connected to crime and violence within the country?  
Give a reason for your answer. \*

---



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19. Poverty can cause people to be aggressive, frustrated and violent due to exclusions and the unequal opportunities given to them.

- True
- False

20. Please read the below statements and answer based on your own understanding. \*  
*Check all that apply.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Poor people suffer from mental illness and aren't aware.					
Lack of sufficient education causes people to become poor.					
It is easy to get out of poverty.					

Poverty is a result of lack of readiness of the government to allocate sufficient resources to help needy people.					
Poor people are regularly discriminated against.					
Women and children living in poverty tend to be victims of abuse.					
Female headed households tend to struggle financially more than male headed households.					
Poor people suffer the consequences of socioeconomic inequalities the most.					
People living in poverty have higher risks of contracting diseases.					
People living in poverty tend to join gangs and partake in drug use.					

21. Do you believe that poverty can affect the wider community that are not poor? If your answer is yes, state how. \*

---

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22. Are you aware of any programs that are offered to help the poor? \*

- Yes  
 No

23. If your answer is yes to the previous question, what are some programs you know about?

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## Appendix B: Profile of Respondents

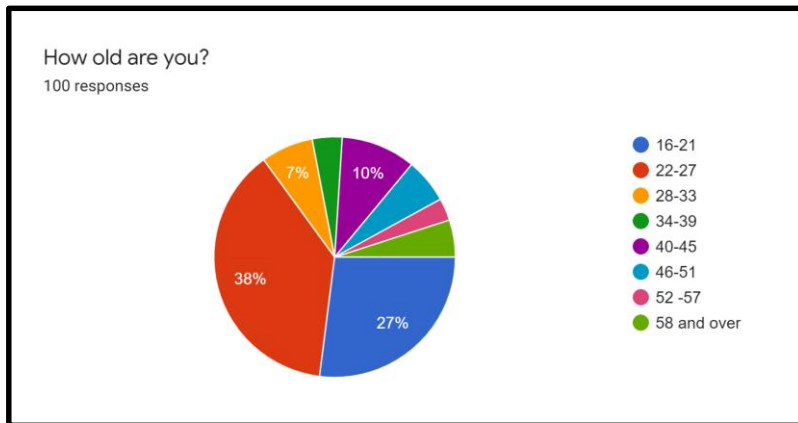


Figure B.1: Ages of Respondents

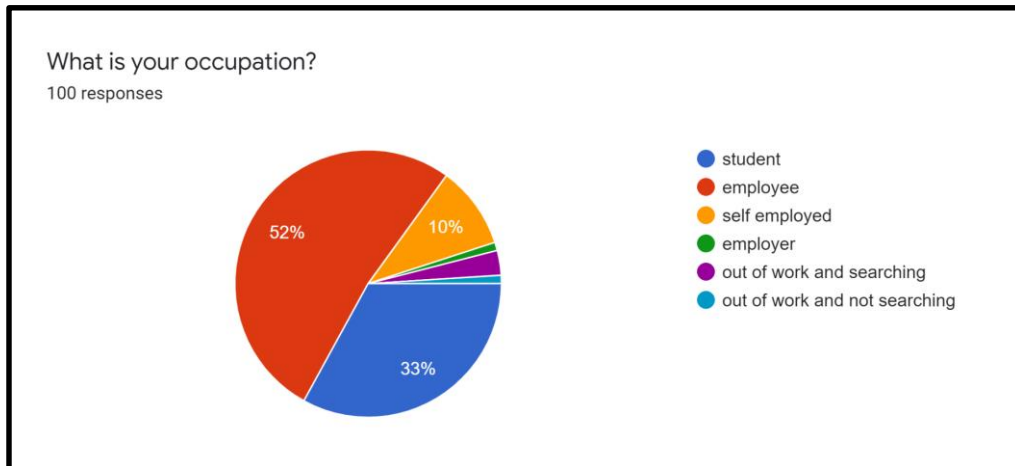
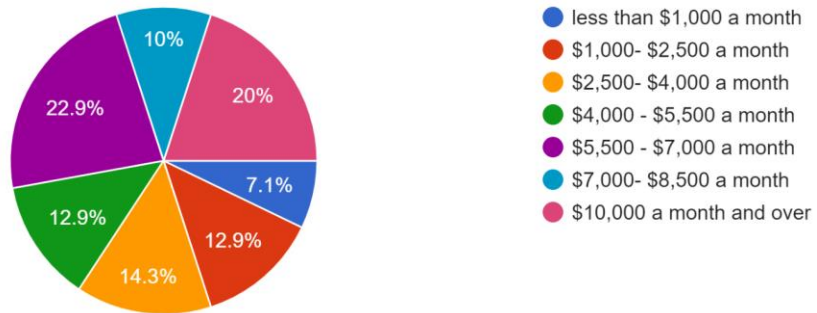


Figure B.2: Occupation Of Respondents

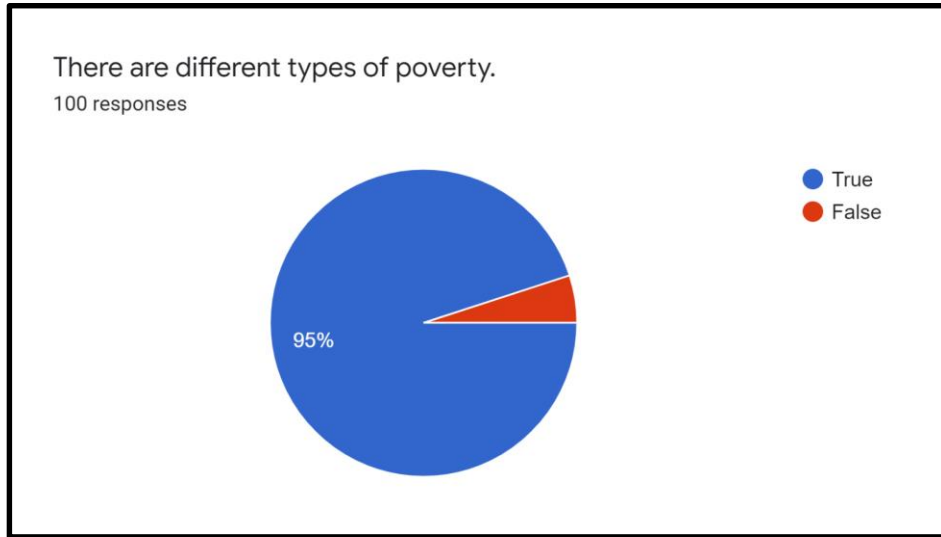
If you are employed, what is your monthly income?

70 responses

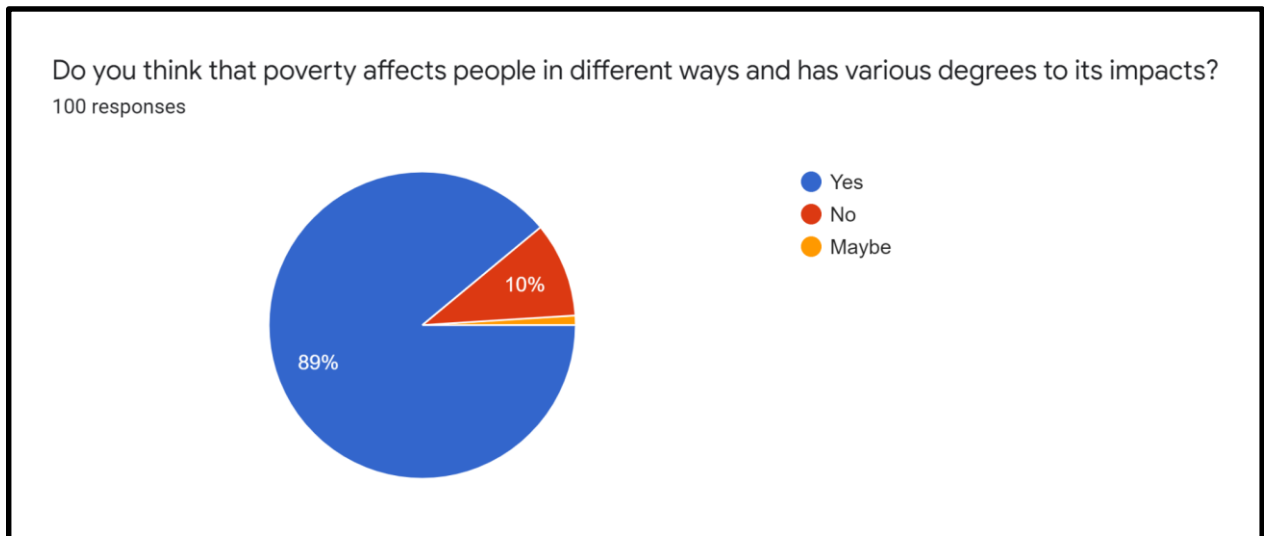


**Figure B.3: Monthly Salary of Employed Respondents**

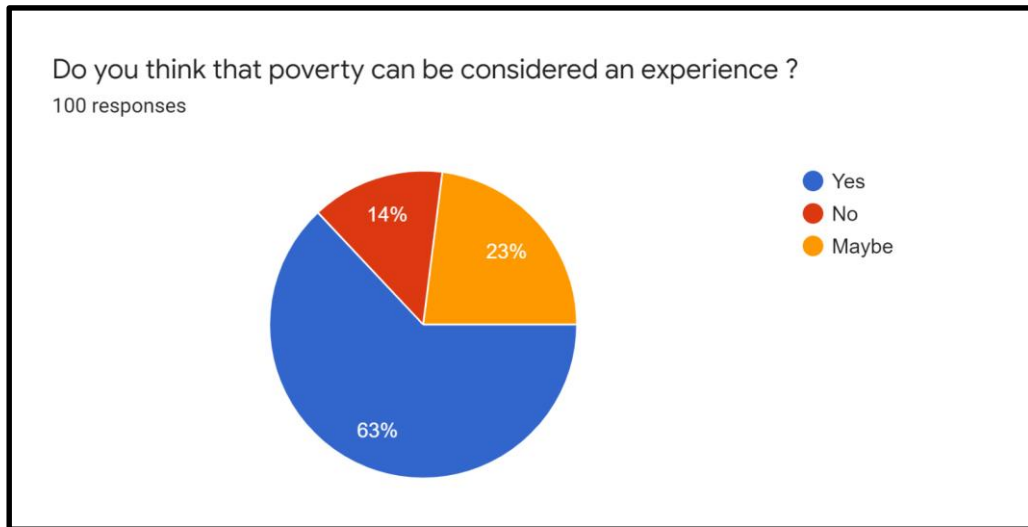
**Appendix C: Respondents' Awareness of the Existence of Varying Types Poverty and its Effects.**



**Figure C.1: Knowledge on the Different Types of Poverty.**



**Figure C.2: Responses to the Various Effects of Poverty on People.**



**Figure C.3: Responses to Poverty being an Experience.**

**Table C.2.1: Voices on the Different Types of Poverty having Different Impacts**

**“Absolute poverty is the lack of food, water etc.**

**Relative poverty is the social perspective of the living standard compared to economic standards.**

**Generational poverty is where the youths of the family are trapped and cannot escape, I don’t think there is just one type of poverty, nor is it linear.”**

**“Well some people are affected mentally or both physically and mentally.”**

**“Some people become emotionally, financially or mentally burdened. Some wallow and stay in poverty refusing to grow and others use the experience as a lesson to grow and overcome.”**

**“Certain necessities are sacrificed in order to make ends meet, so the impact can be different for each person.”**

**“Various ways people are affected by poverty differ as some may choose a life of crime as a means of a way out, some choose to accept jobs below their normal pay range which will cause some form of mental turmoil. Some may become abusive to their family due to the frustration experienced while trying to provide for their families.”**

**“In terms of sex, where a woman can build in one of many ways (conventional or not), men are usually left to fend for themselves.”**

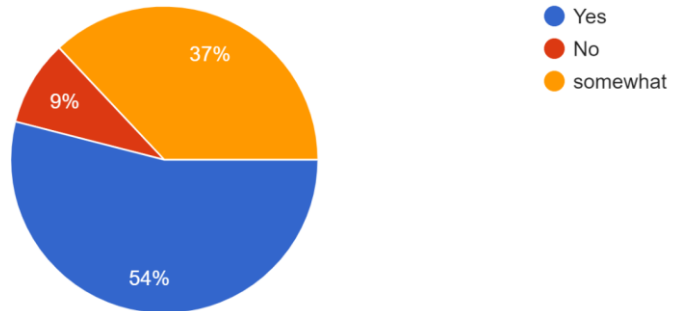
**“Some are affected because of mental illnesses, sickness, and others poor financial choices. For some poverty is just a period where they are transitioning through a better means of living, for example, migrants.”**

**“It is dependent on a person's situation. For example a single mother’s experience of poverty would be different if that of a high school dropout . Their priorities are different.”**

**Appendix D: Responses to Connection between Poverty and Economic History.**

Can poverty be connected to the economic past of Trinidad and Tobago?

100 responses



**Appendix E: Some Reasons for if Women and Children are more Vulnerable than Men**

**“Yes. I suppose there’s more to be cared for / neglected. Consider monthlies.”**

**“Yes, because women and children tend to be more marginalized.”**

**“Yes, because women and children have added expenses than that of men as well as they have lesser access to employment and resources as opposed to men.”**

**“Depends on the situation, yes. A child's needs are more than an adult and it can affect their development. While women may suffer if they are unable to access monthly period supplies.”**

**“I think all suffer some more than others but no one's suffering is greater or based on gender or age.”**

**“They earn less than men. They have to care for children and the general household . Likely to become a single mother which puts more strain financially when they are already making significantly less than men .”**

**“No, each person can suffer in different ways from poverty.”**

**“I suppose they do. Women living in poverty tend to have many children in the hope that they would be able to assist when they are old enough but it is hard and expensive to raise children when you are struggling to make ends meet. Therefore children born into poverty suffer greatly and the women suffer even more as they are already struggling as it is. ”**

## **Appendix F: Responses to Crime Affecting the Wider Community**

**Definitely... in an attempt to acquire things, they may turn to theft, and also become violent as a result of inadequate opportunity in terms of education and training.**

**Yes. Fast ways to make money is usually illegal & persons in poverty might want a fast way to make money**

**No. Not always an accurate reflection of the full situation or environment. Not all environments are the same even when people live in poverty.**

**Sure, because white collar crime preys on poverty stricken communities to distribute weapons and illegal substances.**

**"Circumstances make me what I am" (Buju Banton. A Lot of people are the product of their environment. One person has tried, against all odds, to be a contributing member of society, and because of lack of qualifying criteria, they may have to resort to illegal activities, just to acquire basic needs as Maslow stated.**

**Some yes but only because they don't have many options to provide a steady income because they lack opportunities whereas some are connected to crime because they suffer cultural deprivation where they weren't socialized into valuing education**

**Yes. The effects of perpetual poverty on the human psyche is damaging. This may cause persons who are living in such conditions to be engaged in criminal activities to make ends meet. A vicious cycle.**

**Yes, some poor people resort to crime and violence in order to get money or other things they need or want. Some people end up stealing or murdering people to help themselves.**

**Some people believe that the only way to make a quick dollar to survive may be to commit something illegal which will contribute to crime but this isn't applicable to all.**

**Appendix G: Responses on Social Welfare Programs that Participants are Aware of.**

**“A number of relief grants from the ministry of social development and family services.”**

**“On The Job Training, free mental and physical health and wellness centers, community outreaches.”**

**“Social assistance and various NGOs.”**

**“The Ministry of Social Development usually provides courses for communities in order for them to acquire a skill or skills such as cooking, baking, sewing, makeup, plumbing and electrical etc.”**

**“School feeding program, Food support program, Habitat for Humanity Home Building.”**

**“CEPEP, Public Schools Living Waters Community.”**

**“Social welfare program.”**

**“Living Waters Community.”**

**“Elders Literacy Programs.”**

**“Living Waters, St. Vincent De Paul, The Salvation Army.”**

**“food cards, disability grants, etc.”**

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