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Exploring the survival & livelihood strategies used by retail sector workers in Johannesburg against the backdrop of low remuneration

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCEINCES

MASTER OF ARTS SOCIOLOGY

EXPLORING THE SURVIVAL & LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES USED BY RETAIL SECTOR WORKERS IN JOHANNESBURG AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF LOW REMUNERATION.

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Development Sociology.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Development Sociology (by Coursework and Research Report) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

Signed_____ on this____ day of _____ 20___

Zivai Sunungukayi Mukorombindo

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DEDICATION

To Dorothy Jiri, Ranganai Mukorombindo, Kundai Kuwengwa and Maybe Jiri.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATM – Automated Teller Machine

CBD – Central Business District

CDE - Centre for Development Enterprise

COJ – City of Johannesburg

CPI – Consumer Price Index

ESAP – Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

ILO – International Labour Organisation

LLL – Land-Labour-Livelihood

M&G – Mail & Guardian

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

PnP – Pick 'n' Pay

StatsSA – Statistics South Africa

SWOP – Society, Work and Development Institute

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research Background and Context of Study

Many studies within the spectrum of social sciences that look at South African worker struggles and labour relations have been focusing on the hard labour sectors like mining, construction, metalwork and textile. Other forms of work have started to surface within the social sciences discourse and these include domestic work (Cock, 1980; Ally, 2009) and security guards (Sefalafala & Webster, 2013). I have thus identified the retail sector as an area of study which present and prospective scholars need to pay more attention to in South Africa. At a global level, the retail sector has been identified as one that does not have good labour relations and the wages it offers are very low to such an extent that the retail workplaces have been juxtaposed to sweatshops and it has been seen that these two are similar (Chan, 2011). This means that the retail sector world over has not been making steps in offering employees decent work as prescribed by the International Labour Organisation. Publications on labour issues within the retail sector in the country have been limited but scholars like Kenny (2001; 2004; 2007; 2009; 2011) have been making progressive strides in addressing matters that arise in that particular industry.

Labour movements have a history and mandate of fighting for the rights of the workers and representing them in tripartite negotiations with business and the state. However studies have shown that with capital interests being prioritised by the government over those of the workers and citizens as this is evident in the 1996 class project which saw the adoption of the GEAR as macroeconomic policy. Neoliberalism has become the key economic philosophy guiding business operations in the country (Marais, 2011). This kind of operation has left businesses with the power to undermine trade union activity leaving movements in a situation

whereby it is difficult for them to organise as there are new forms of work which makes it a daunting task for organisation to be successful (Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu, 2007; Kenny, 2005; Buhlungu, 2009). There have been calls by some academics who have suggested that there is a need for labour movements to re-strategise their way of organising as they are continuing to lose power (Webster & Adler, 1999) but this is yet to yield positive results. The crisis of unionism in wage labour has left a lot of workers in a precarious position and this means that the workers are also subject to precarious livelihoods outside the world of work.

In relation to this, the study focused on the livelihood and survival strategies that are adopted by low paid workers in the retail sector as it is taking time for their wage woes to be practically addressed. This research report sought to unravel the livelihood experiences and choices of workers employed in the retail industry. The underlying argument here is to show how the low remuneration in the industry has resulted in the growth of a class of the working poor. The study however goes on to offer an explanation of the livelihood and survival strategies that are being used by this class as well as other dynamics involved.

Significance of Study

The importance of addressing the issue in question for this research lies in its theoretical and practical implications. The failure of the betterment of salaries for workers means that the workers' struggles are being diverted elsewhere. Therefore there is a need to investigate all possible aspects of the workers' lives and see how this low remuneration is resonating into their broader lives.

Aims and Goals of Study

This research was aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the livelihood of retail industry workers who are getting low wages in a city that demands a lot financially. The study was also targeted at exploring the survival strategies that are being used by the workers in the midst of their low wage woes. The research attempted to understand the nature and dynamics of the strategies that may be used as well as the experiences of the workers in2 relation to this.

The goal of this study was to bridge the gap between studies that focus on workplace struggle that falls in the discipline of Industrial Sociology and urban livelihood studies that generally fall within the discipline of Development Sociology i.e. showing that there is definitely an overlap in these two branches of Sociology. Thus it is high time for scholars in the field of sociology start treating the two branches holistically. The study was also intended at contributing to the existing literature on work and livelihood. Commencing new channels on the dialogue and research of workers' struggles was also envisioned by this study.

Questions Tackled

- How are low paid retail sector workers managing to survive given their low wages?
- How has the low remuneration affected their livelihoods?
- Are there any other survival strategies they are taking to keep their households from collapsing?
- What are the dynamics of the survival strategies they engage in?
- How sufficient are the strategies they have undertaken?

Chapter Outline

Chapter II provides background information that stimulated this study to take place in the first place. It basically gives an overview of the issues of waged labour, urban life and livelihoods. It is a principal acknowledgement of what has been done in relation to the topic both theoretically and methodologically. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework that shaped the study and it will also explain it.

Chapter III basically shows how the research was conducted. It presents a comprehensive detail of the research design, methods, methodology, data collection techniques and analysis, and procedures that were utilised in answering the research questions and addressing the study's objectives.

The findings and outcomes of the study will be presented and discussed in Chapter IV and V. The presentation and discussion will be guided by the evidence that was obtained from the research data. These two chapters are aimed at providing insight into the research questions and they will also serve as the platform for the analysis of the study. In Chapter IV I show the general background of retail work and low remuneration. The argument shown in that chapter is that in as much as the retail sector is giving workers low pay, it has to some extent provided them with something given the high employment rate in the country for these people who lack post-matric qualifications. On a comparative scale it is also shown that the workers' labour market histories prove that they might not have a lot of option in terms of jobs.

Chapter V then shows how the workers are managing to survive despite low wages. It shows that workers try as much as possible to alter their lifestyle in various ways so that it can meet their limited budgets. The use of social networks and social capital is also pivotal in sustaining livelihoods so as the various saving techniques that the workers adopt which

ensures that their spending is kept at minimum. The chapter also shows that there are other income generating activities adopted by the workers but these are not very common because of time constraints.

Chapter VI synthesises the information provided in the preceding chapters by tying all points together and presenting the position taken by the study based on what was found by the research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: PRIOR RESEARCH ON WORK AND LIVELIHOOD

This chapter scans the literature on low wage life, retail sector workers' struggles as well as survival and livelihood strategies in order to situate this study within its scholarly position. It does so by considering theoretical and methodological contributions to the topic. The literature review will provide an overview on the discourse of work and the urban working poor's lives outside their world of work with the idea that their low and sometimes insecure wages have an impact on their lifestyle and other activities they pursue after work. Urban life trends drawn on previous research from different countries will be taken into consideration as well as the root cause of urban working poverty. The history of working poor livelihood strategies in South Africa as a whole and beyond will be presented. The literature review is drawn from the ideas and studies within the field of economic and social sciences. A trace of the intellectual progression within this field will be provided by this chapter which will also be summarising and synthesising the arguments and ideas presented by others with the intention of providing a base of this study and giving an insight of where the study is coming from.

The Importance of Work Discourse

Topics which are concerned with work should be approached with esteem given its dynamic nature and complex evolution and how important work is to our society. The definition of work has been subject of debate in the field of social sciences with most of the dialogue entangled over the social and economic principle of work. Hodson & Sullivan (2002:4) define work as:

> "the creation of goods or services, which may be directly consumed by the worker or sold to someone else. Work thus includes not only paid labour but also self-employed labour and unpaid labour including useful work done in the home. Work provides material and personal benefits, but it can also be a source of frustration and aggravation."

This definition of work follows the productive delineation of work which purports the idea that people work with the aim of gaining something out of that activity. The authors show the paradoxical nature of work by showing that people draw "material and personal benefits" from work whereas at the same time it can bring "frustration and aggravation" into their lives. The point that this study makes can be built up from that paradox in that I show an overlap in the two points being raised by Hodson & Sullivan (2002) and I also add to show the importance of that paradox both theoretically and practically.

Most literature shows the economic dimension of work from imperial societies to feudal societies to merchant capitalism to the industrial revolution to the post-industrial era. The division of labour was expanded in these societies and this resulted in the social stratification articulated by Weber that is tenacious in today's society (Saunders, 1990). This gave rise to the lower social stratum, those of a lower income bracket and the retail sector workers who were used for this study fall within this band. However Hodson & Sullivan (2002) trace the economic dimension of work to as early as hunting and gathering societies and the early agricultural societies. They argue that in as much as work exercised in these societies differs from what it later became; there is still an element of benefiting from work even though they admit that this was done at a completely different level from what we are seeing in the modern era whereby wages have become the cornerstone of the labourer's benefit. Though these societies had an economic system, it was not based on accumulation like the later ones in that these were solely based on subsistence.

The sole focus of this study was work under capitalism whereby workers sell their labour to owners of production and in return they get a wage but I felt that it is essential to understand the dynamics of work even outside capitalism as it will help in shedding light to the importance of work which formed a substantial part of this study. There is a school of thought which argues that work is a human activity that all desire to engage in no matter the ends. In relation to this scholars like Max-Neef et al (1991) state that work is not just a need but it is also a want, meaning that people go to work no matter the circumstances or outcomes. In any society, people wake up in the morning and work; even in agricultural societies where the people might not have information on weather patterns (whether the rains are going to fall or whether there is going to be a drought) they still engage in the activity of work. This study echoes this point in trying to show that in as much as remuneration in contemporary workplaces (with the focus being retail workers) is low people still hold on to their jobs because work is part of life for the human being who has been socialised that she/he must wake up early in the morning and spend the day working. However this study went beyond this point to show that in as much as work is that important to human beings it is a source of livelihood and if it does not guarantee this, people look somewhere else for the provision of a livelihood but still remain in their jobs. Even in nomad societies where people work land for subsistence, they relocate when productivity shrinks because they want to be able to sustain themselves. This study on the other hand provides an examination of how contemporary workers respond to their situation of low wages by showing how they alter livelihoods.

This study came up against the backdrop of an interesting argument posited by feminist theorist and autonomous Marxist Kathi Weeks. She impudently challenges the beliefs that work is an innate act that is socially good (Weeks, 2011). She diverges from the traditional thought held by feminists and Marxists that workers should be emancipated merely from their

dire conditions. These scholars call for equal pay and the betterment of the conditions on the shop floor. However Weeks furthers her argument by saying that in taking work as a given, we have "depoliticized" it, or removed it from the dominion of political appraisal. Employment is now largely privatized, and work-based activism has withered. We have accepted waged work as the principal instrument for income dispersal, as an ethical compulsion, and as a means of defining ourselves and others as social and political subjects.

The core idea here is that the proletariat has been left in so much misery with the changing economics of the world and the reason for this wretchedness is that they have been seduced by the dogma of work and the only way to get out of that position is to refuse the culture of work (Weeks, 2011). The working class is assumed to be passionate about its work and this allows it to produce excessive goods in a bid to satisfy the enormous desire and requirement for work on the part of the employees (Weeks, 2011). The proletariat in this sense should not have the classical Marxist thought of bettering their work conditions or trying to reverse alienation from it but they should actually reject the principle that work as the highest duty and moral obligation. However Weeks notes that this process of autonomisation should not end there, but rather it should be a passage of reconfiguring the existing forms of production that is to say it should open the door to new alternatives. She imagines a post-work society that is productive but where people are free from the bondage of work. The post-work period will mark the deliverance of the individual from enslavement under the wage relation. This study is a follow up on Weeks' argument but it notes that we are not prepared for a post-work period yet. It suggests that we are in an era whereby that notion of "The Refusal of Work" as suggested by Weeks is not an option, rather we are in a period whereby low paid workers look at other alternatives to substantiate their income. The reason behind this is that capitalism has deepened its roots in society to such an extent that it has become so powerful;

therefore, a drastic challenge like the one suggested by Weeks is not yet applicable in the context we are living today.

In the following segment I discuss the retail sector as a workplace of utmost importance, especially in the South African context where it employs a vast number of people and also because of its enormous contribution to the country's economy.

An Overview of the South African Retail Sector

The definition of retail has been used differently by myriad scholars as the industry spans across different activities and practices. However the general consensus is that retail is the sale of goods or products by general dealers and supply chains that purchase the goods and products from manufacturers and resell them in smaller quantities with the aim of making a profit (Harper, 2008). This general definition is the one that is utilised by this study. There are numerous clusters of retail that are identified in a document published by the Gauteng Department of Treasury (2012). These include retailers of products such as food, beverages, tobacco, toiletries, cosmetics, pharmaceutical and medical goods, clothing and footwear, household furniture, appliances, equipment etc.

This research focused on workers in Pick 'n' Pay stores and it can be noted that this store deals with many of the goods mentioned in the clusters stated above. Pick 'n' Pay, along with other South African major retailers (supermarkets, groceries and departmental stores) follows the inclinations that are practiced by Western retail giants like Wal-Mart, Kroger, Tesco, Metro AG and Carrefour of USA, UK, Germany and France respectively.

Overtime, the South African retail sector has consistently expanded. StatsSA (2013) reports an average annual growth in sales of approximately 5% from 2002 to 2012. Prinsloo (2010) found that the total surface area occupied by retail in South Africa had increased from

5 722 846 square meters in 2002 to 18 418 073 square meters in 2010. "The Gauteng province also saw retail space increasing from 3,062,929 square meters in 2002 to 8,545,522 square meters in 2010, which was greater than the retail area of the entire country in 2002" (p.4).

The retail sector in South Africa comprises of innumerable small retailers but it is the domination of the urban market by large corporate chains (Bezuidenhout, Godfrey & Theron, 2003) that caught the attention of this study. For the food segment, a study by Trade Tatler (2010) showed that Pick 'n' Pay, Shoprite, Woolworths and Spar compete for almost the total formal market stake in the country. In the first quarter of 2013 Wholesale and Retail Trade was the third largest contributor to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), contributing 16.0% of its total GDP. Outdoing the sector was Government Services and Finance, Real Estate and Business Services which contributed 16.8% and 22.4% respectively (StatsSA, 2013). In its 2012 Mid-Year Quarterly Review, The Provincial Treasury of Gauteng reported that the province alone contributed more than a quarter (26.5%) of the gross value added by the industry (Gauteng Dept of Treasury, 2012) a point that motivated the reason behind why this research focused on Johannesburg as a concentration of study.

After noting how influential and important the retail sector is in the South African context especially in the case of Gauteng, it is at this point that I acknowledge the point raised by Ndungu & Theron (2008) who concludes that the sector is one of the biggest employers in South Africa. As of 2012, Pick 'n' Pay which boasts more than 900 stores across the African continent employed more than 49 000 workers (Taal, 2012). This huge workforce made this particular entity an interest for this study. That being identified, in this study I discuss the issues of the low wages and precarious positions that are currently being experienced by workers in the retail sector and I examine how they have managed to shape the livelihood of the workers outside their workplaces.

The Struggles of Retail Sector Workers Under Labour Market Flexibility

The South African Retail industry is characterised by insecure employment (Kenny, 2007). This trend has plunged not only the country's retail sector but all other sectors. This can be attributed to a process that has been referred to by Webster (2006) as the informalisation of work. However before dwelling much on the effects of insecure employment on the retail sector workers, it is of utmost importance to unravel the root cause of this notion which has been identified by Webster (2006) as labour market flexibility.

Joy (2000) recognises Guy Standing as a leading scholar on the ever changing patterns of the global labour market. According to Standing (1999) the change in the global economic terrain over the last quarter of a century saw periods of economic downturn and meltdown resulted in a shift from the regulated to unregulated markets. As a result of responding to the global markets, corporates pursued a more flexible labour market with the aim of maximising their profit margins, hence this is when the notion of labour market flexibility was born. This notion has been developed from then onwards both conceptually and practically.

Labour market flexibility is born out of the notion of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism which is basically the freeing of markets and non-state intervention in the markets has drastically impacted the labour process. One of the most talked about examples of this in the African context is the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) of Zimbabwe whereby the labour terrain of the country evolved due to the repercussions brought about by the new system which was implemented in the early 1990s (Sachikonye, 1995). This will be discussed further after grounding ourselves with the idea of labour market flexibility first.

Labour market flexibility has been defined as "the ability of companies to adapt to the use of labour changes in other markets" (Bezuidenhout & Kenny 2000:3). Bezuidenhout & Kenny (2000) note that there are four types of labour market flexibility:

(i) work process flexibility (workers undertaking a range of tasks i.e. multi-skilling and job rotation);

(ii) functional flexibility (the alteration of working time patterns e.g. part-time work, shift system, job sharing and temporary work)

(iii) numerical flexibility (the number of the employees recruited by a firm is adjusted based on the needs of a firm, i.e. external flexibility and the adjustment of workers' working hours, i.e. internal flexibility) (Brunhes 1989) and

(iv) wage flexibility ("the shift from uniform pay systems towards individualised or team pay, with variability based on performance" (Horwitz, 1995:2).

Labour market flexibility has rapidly exacerbated in South Africa since it started gaining prominence in the country's retail sector in the 1980s (Kenny, 2001). It has been argued by labour relations experts and industrial sociologists (Webster, 2006; Kenny, 2009) that the workers who fall within this category of work are in a precarious position. Due to these arrangements workers are in a position where they are enormously exploited getting very low wages and often experiencing violation of their rights. They are often perceived to be very difficult to unionise amongst other insecurities that result from the precarious nature of the job (Kalleberg, 2003).

The discourse of Labour Market flexibility should be treated with extreme interest by scholars of economic and social science. Standing (1999) concludes one of his chapters with a point that raises eyebrows to people involved in these fields. He states that with business pushing for more flexibility in the labour market, state regulation instruments are becoming weaker and ineffective in ensuring security. In the European Union countries, there is the idea of flexicurity that was put on the table by some researchers which entails that flexibility can be exercised whilst at the same time assuring security of employees (Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). This however remains an idea that is difficult to practice as Wilthagen & Tros (2004)

have shown that an arrangement like this is difficult to attain given the power that business has been awarded through liberalisation (Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). It is worth noting the effects of labour market flexibility on the South African retail working class as it is relevant in today's society and these are outlined below.

Low Wages

It can be noticed from the above section that there are a lot of insecurities created by Labour Market Flexibility but this study focused more on low wage chronicles of retail workers in the South African context which come up as a result financial or wage flexibility. Due to Labour Market Flexibility real minimum wages have declined in what can be termed a process of income insecurity (Standing, 2009).

Bowls (2010) mentions that globalisation is the source of the misery currently faced by the working class worldwide. This point was echoed by Chan & Siu (2011) who did a study of Wal-Mart and its supplier partners in China which concluded that the company was "squeezing the employee" in a bid to maximise its profits. The company achieved this by giving the workers very low wages and like many other employers in China got away with it because the government set the lowest possible level of the legal minimum wage in a bid to lure foreign direct investments into the country. Since the wages have been set this low, the notion of a fair wage that is desired by the worker is also essentially low. Selections of Li's diary (a Wal-Mart employee in China) shown by Myers & Chan (2011) unravels the struggles of underpaid employees of this firm. It shows that Li struggled to earn a living and like any other employee of the large conglomerate he could not even afford to buy food for himself. Converging with the story of Li, this study sheds more light on the struggles of South African retail workers who are employed by a company which has similar practices like the one that Li is employed in.

According to Greenhouse (2008) the American retail worker is paid so little to such an extent that she/he cannot even afford to purchase the goods sold where she/he works. This converges with the idea postulated by Marx (1977) who identified the gross exploitation of workers at the hands of capitalism through his theory of alienation of labour. But at the same time an interesting research carried out in the USA showed that in as much as the retail industry pays very low wages, the workers in that sector keep on working there (Luce, 2013). This research was following up on the assertion by Luce in that it examines how the low paid employees still manage to go on with their jobs regardless of this unacceptable remuneration.

Research by Barcheisi shows that in South Africa due to flexible labour arrangements, incomes have declined drastically with younger workers, women and Africans being hit the hardest and this is the same group of people that is dominant in retail work. He and other scholars note that employers are paying below the minimum wage rate. This may be attributed to the liberal nature of business that has been encouraged world over since the turn of the 1970s which has also resulted in the limitation of state social welfare which would be necessary to enhance the incomes of the poor. Salaries of retail workers are very low. As of January 2014 a general assistant earned a monthly average of R2 474.36, a merchandiser and a shop assistant R2 922.83, sales assistant R3 689.12 and a fork lifter R2 700 (MyWage, 2014). These are relatively low figures considering how the cost of living in the country are high especially that of Johannesburg.

Salaries of these workers have been stagnant and the situation has also been worsened by the increase of the inflation rate of the country which has pushed up the prices of most basic necessities. Take for instance that the price of petrol alone has almost tripled from the years 2009 to 2014 yet we can see that the salaries stated in Kenny's 2007 article are almost the same as the same as the ones the workers are getting these days as shown above. This confirms that the wages have been stagnant or even worse they have been declining. As a

result of this one can argue that the quality of the livelihoods of the workers is deteriorating. This research is also an examination of these deteriorating livelihoods in that it shows how the livelihoods of the workers is being affected by the poor performance of salaries against the inflation rate. At the same time the report also scrutinises the livelihood of the younger workers who have recently entered into a job market that is manifested by low wages.

It is not only the income wages that have been affected by labour market flexibility, but the non-wage benefits have also experienced a sharp decline over the years. This has however affected not only the retail sector workers alone as it can be seen that most workers in government parastatals and state entities which were corporatized or commercialised as a result of neoliberal policies pursued by the state lost the privilege of non-wage benefits as well. The non-wage benefits which includes housing whereby the employer provides or pays for housing, health and life insurance, social security, funding of education and many others are now hard to come by in the South African workplace. Utilities like water, electricity, telephone, gas etc. that used to be subsidised by the state were privatised in South Africa through the neoliberal policies that were put forward by the government (Marais, 2010). This leaves the lowly paid employee with the duty to take care of a lot of things in what Marais (2010) has termed the erosion of social protection by the welfare state. With retail sector workers getting few and in some cases no benefits mainly because of their arrangements of employment that usually offers them short-term contracts, this issue became pivotal for this study. Retail sector workers (focusing on those who work in food and groceries) get worker discounts when they purchase goods from their workplaces and this can be regarded as a benefit. This study however evaluates the impact of this form of benefits on the livelihoods of the workers.

High Turnover

In a nutshell it can be said that Labour Market Flexibility has resulted in a myriad of insecurities of workers employed in the South African retail sector. The emergence of Labour Market Flexibility in the 1970s has raised the level of turnover which large firms has since welcomed as it is working for them but leaves the working poor without job security (Standing, 2011). The global labour flexibility has been aggravated by the unremitting invention of machinery in the workplace. As a result of this "older workers find skills obsolete, while more workers find that once they lose a job their prospects involve lower earnings and loss of 'career'" (Standing, 2009:68).

Jobs in the retail sector are no longer secure. This can be seen in the case of Pick 'n' Pay whereby when its annual profits fell by 51% in 2013 the retailer looked at cutting its cost by shedding jobs (Kew, 2013). In the words of Isaac McLeod the Human Resources Director at the grocer, Pick 'n' Pay had to "get rid of the wasted employees" (Kew, 2013). As a result of this, one of the themes that came out of this study is that of job and career prospects. With low wages and low career security in their jobs, in this study I examined the prospects of the workers, their intention with regards to their future and the plans and mechanisms that they have put in the event of the unfortunate circumstances of losing their jobs or even in the instance that they just feel like. This theme should be treated with full concentration as it overlaps with the workers livelihoods as it is shown in the later chapters of this report.

Working Hours

According to Kenny (2004: 128) "Labour market flexibility in retailing had its roots in extended trading hours, as part of a shift to 'lifestyle shopping' in particular urban markets in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s." Due to the demand of retail products and goods, most if not all retail outlets open during weekends (including Sundays) and public holidays. As these are some of the busiest days, the workers in these outlets often find themselves working most if not the whole day during these periods. The consequence of this is that these employees do not have extra time of their own which they can use in indulging in other activities hence part of this research is to investigate time management on the part of the employees. As Kenny (2001) shows, the rates that workers are paid to work on these occasions are relatively low hence there was a strike by retail workers who demanded that the rate they are paid for working on Sundays should be doubled. In this research I examined the effects of these long and unorthodox working hours on the livelihoods of the workers as well as their personal perceptions on this subject. The issue of time management is also tackled in relation to this.

Working outside standard and daytime hours can be defined as non-standard work scheduling (Henly, Sheafer & Waxman, 2006). Non-standard hours can be regular, done via shifts or irregular or on an on-call basis (Enchautegui, 2013). In the US about 40% of the total labour force spends a lot of time working on such type of schedules. Non-standard work schedules are more resolute on low income workers because those who earn high income will have other job alternatives (Hamermesh, 1999). In most high level jobs, working in non-standard hours is a matter of choice but in the lower paying jobs like the ones this study focused on, it is compulsory. This leaves the workers without an option but to just abide thus cutting down the hours they should spend on other activities. According to Standing, at al (1996), the rate in which workers in South Africa are working overtime is slightly longer than that of

international standards. Therefore this study offered an examination of how the workers deal with working during hours like these with regards to their livelihoods. In addition to the above shown challenges on time, there are other trials that can be faced by workers who work on these schedules as outlined by Enchautegui (2013). She notes that workers face the challenge of securing child care that will look after their young ones when they are working at a time they should be looking after their own kids. This can be very expensive since the workers seeking child care work in low paying jobs. However this is in the American context, when looking at the case of South Africa it can be said that the retail worker gets very low wages that she cannot afford to pay for child care therefore in this study I explore how these workers balance their work-family time. And also this study is more concerned with how workers engage in extra income generating activities if there is any given these unbearable working hours patterns. This research examines the balance of work-family time amongst the workers. I show the measures they take in acquiring childcare and this is done mainly through the use of social networking.

The Decent Work Discourse

The concept of decent work is a notion that was introduced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as an index to measure the acceptable quality of jobs created (Ghai, 2002). The notion of decent work has become an important subject in the field of labour relations to such an extent that the Society, Work, Development Institute (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg has established the Decent Work and Development Initiative headed by Professor Edward Webster one of the biggest pundits in Sociology of Work.

The underlying idea of this concept is that labour is not a commodity that can be bought or sold on a market like any other goods and products like most capitalists and mainstream economists think it is. The ILO argues that labour is a human activity that should be treated

with dignity. It entails that employment should embrace equity, freedom and at the same time provide human security. The major characteristics of decent work are fair income, provision for social protection, security within the workplace, involvement in the decision making within the workplace especially on issues that affects the workers' livelihoods, freedom of expression (i.e. the right to organise) as well as equal opportunities for workers of both genders. The issue of working decent hours is also covered within that same notion (ILO, 2012).

Putting this into perspective of this study it can be argued that the conditions stipulated in the decent work discourse are not converging with the circumstances that retail sector workers find themselves in waged employment. ILO (2012) confirms that South African employers are lagging behind in terms of providing decent work. ILO shows that in 2010 34% of the country's labour force was on a low-pay rate, only 53% were entitled to maternity leave and only 33% had the privilege of being members of a union. The ILO put forward the idea of decent work with the hope that this would aid in reducing and eradicating poverty. However it can be noted that this goal is hard to achieve due to globalisation and flexibility. This study sheds more light on the plight of retail sector workers given that decent work could be far from reaching them at least for now due to the macroeconomic policies pursued by the government that makes it difficult for decent work to be attained. In this study I show that in as much as the discourse on decent work is important, it is fundamental to go beyond this notion but to also try and understand what is the situation on the ground for the workers given that decent work can be hard to achieve at the moment due to the flexible nature of the labour market. At the same time this study is also an attempt to kick-start the expansion on the debates on decent work.

Retail Sector Workers: The Working Poor

Marais (2011) states that access to paid employment in South Africa is the key factor affecting the poverty status of households in the country. In as much as poverty is habitually associated with joblessness and lack of income, the US Department of Labour concluded that a substantial fraction of poor people in the world are actually in jobs earning an income (US Department of Labour, 2011). This group of people have been referred to in a myriad of literature as the "working poor." The wages that the working poor receive are very low to such an extent that they struggle to provide themselves with basic necessities. As a result of this Lohmann (2008) says that these people are experiencing "in-work poverty." Because of their low incomes, the working poor are forced to make choices regarding how they cope in this condition and this is something I will discuss in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

When conceptualising the working poor, the US Department of Labour (2011) said that the working poor are those people who spend 27 weeks of the year or half of the year's days at work but earn a salary which is below the poverty datum line. This may also be used in the context of South Africa but what makes the latter's case an interesting one is that its cost of living is relatively high according to Bisseker (2014). With low wages, no benefits and no security, the South African labour force is not shielded against poverty by their jobs (Marais, 2011). Marais shows that the poverty of the working class has been increasing drastically in recent years. He notes that the number of those employed but living in poverty was 900 000 in 1995 but the figure went up to two million in 2003. This is evidence that there is a gradual increase in something that could be a problem; something that the government and stakeholders involved should attend to hence this study is an attempt to stimulate the academic discussion on this issue. Marais also shows the density of the working poor in the country by saying that 1.4 million workers employed in the formal sector (i.e. 18% of the

total labour force) were earned less than R1 000 per month in 2005. Fast forward 2014, Bisseker states that with an income of R3 000 and below per month, the South African Working poor is finding it hard to get out of poverty.

The other relative characterisation of the working poor is that they are people who are paid below the national household wage income. One South African economist as quoted by Bisseker (2014) pegs the country's median salary for non-farm workers in the formal sector at R4 000 per month. This eventually translates to that, given the salaries retail sector workers in South Africa are getting as outlined earlier; many of them will be classified as the working poor. Research in 2010 showed that 45% of workers in South Africa were being paid below the median wage income and on average they were actually receiving 36% less than the legal minimum wage and with these figures in mind Bisseker (2014) concludes her article by saying that 50% of the South African labour force are living in poverty despite having a wage. This shows that South Africa and the rest of the world has a growing problem of the working poor and this study contributes to the knowledge of understanding some of the dynamics of the livelihood of this group of people.

The dialogue pertaining the working poor needs to be dealt with utmost care as research in the United Kingdom (UK) confirmed that the working poor class is increasing (Morris, 2014). This point is echoed by Bisseker (2014) who predicts that in South Africa the working poor are going to be there for a long time from now as most jobs created in the country are in low-paid and low-skilled profession.

Just like in the US, in most South African households there are one or two people that the household depends on financially. Therefore if that person is getting low wages it means that the household will drown in poverty thus increasing the number of urban poverty in the case of this study. A survey done in the US shows that working poverty was worse for women in

that they generally earn lower wages (Klein & Rones, 1989) hence female headed households is also a fundamental focus for this study. This study was carried out with the point in mind that labour market flexibility is creating or increasing the amount of in-work poverty in Johannesburg, the economic hub of the African continent and also that the majority of the retail sector workers are female.

Rakodi (1994) argues that skills are essential in the discourse of urban poverty. She says that the urban poor lack the essential skills to elevate them out of poverty hence they remain confined to that situation. She also adds that most of the urban poor are from the African race and this is because of past practices which deprived them of business opportunities in the case of South Africa this would be Apartheid. This pattern is not only unique to South Africa but it can be seen in most African practices as a result of colonial rule and in the US and other countries as well.

In her study of how the changing nature of the textile and footwear industry in KwaZulu Natal is affecting the livelihood of the workers in that area, Mosoetsa (2011) argues that labour is a vital asset for the urban poor. However she concludes by saying the same asset is also fragile given the dynamics that have been brought about by globalisation and the liberalisation of trade. With regards to that in the next section of this chapter I discuss the other options that workers use in order to survive and secure a living. This comes against the backdrop of the argument presented by Rakodi (1994:655) who states that:

> "even when urban economies are largely based on formal sector economic activity, household poverty is not simply associated with wages. The resources and opportunities available to households to avail themselves of services and non-wage income-earning opportunities vary, so that conditions

of economic austerity the ability of households to adapt to changing circumstances differ."

The Strategies Used by the Working Poor

Many studies that have been carried out in South Africa and beyond show that there are diverse strategies that are utilised by people in order to enhance their incomes. These studies confirm that it is not only the poor who use multiple strategies to validate their incomes but also even those who are well off still have the desire to cushion their remuneration. It can therefore be noted that the topic of strategies and livelihoods is becoming an important one that needs to be closely studied and monitored noting patterns and trends of the adoption of such tactics by people. This research attempted to contribute to the knowledge and literature of the theme of strategies and livelihood.

Mosoetsa (2011) investigates how families in KZN are surviving given that the footwear and textile industry that provided income is now as good as defunct due to the change in global economic trends that has resulted in the industry to rely on imports mainly from China. She notes that income is highly insecure in that part of the country as people continue to lose their jobs due to factory shutdowns as formal employment continues to collapse in that province. She says that those who are still in formal employment carry the liability of supporting the whole family which could be made up of a lot of members due to the African notion of extended family. She draws the household dependence theory on a single wage earner from the work of Rakodi (1994). Mosoetesa's interviews confirmed that in as much as their incomes are unsustainable, they never "go to bed hungry." These people are adopting multiple income generating ventures to such an extent that many of them said they did not know the combined income of their households since it comes from various sources.

State grants are becoming pivotal in helping insecure wages to sustain households in KZN (Mosoetsa, 2011). Mosoetsa also notes that state grants, gifts and remittances from relatives and friends are fundamental in sustaining households in that area and this is something that can also be confirmed in the Zimbabwean case done by Mukwedeya (2009). The study by Mukwedeya shows that in the midst of hardships in the urban areas of the troubled Southern African nation, wages are not enough to sustain livelihood therefore remittances have become the cornerstone of keeping the households from crumbling. Some people even sell some goods they make at their homes. Following a five month long strike in the platinum belt of South Africa in 2014, one worker confirmed in daily newspaper *The Star* that when he was not earning wages during the mayhem, he turned to selling the spinach he cultivates at his home and this kept him financially stable during these uncertain times. The KZN study by Mosoetsa, the Harare study by Mukwedeya and the case in the North West shown here happened in times of crisis i.e. loss of jobs, economic turmoil and strike respectively. These three studies show how the working class turn to other means of survival during uncertain times. They differ from this study in that I explored the survival strategies used by workers arguing that the workers do not need crises to adopt the strategies but they are always on high alert.

Other strategies that Mosoesta found out included obtaining loans from "Mashonisa" (loan sharks) and being part of associations that aid them in accessing financial and other support resources. Bond (2013) shows that the extent at which the working class in South Africa is relying on microfinance mashonisas is alarming. Mashonisas and other microfinance institutions have become popular amongst low paid workers in South Africa as they offer this group 'unsecured credit'. Looking at the platinum-belt town of Marikana near Rustenburg in the North West province Bond (2013:581) states that, "visually it is impossible to miss the dozen distinct 'Cash Loans' and similar shopfront signs along a two-kilometer stretch of

Main Road." With salaries pegged at low rate, workers have pinned their faith in microfinancing and Bond confirms that most workers are confident that they can meet the cost of finance:

> "Miners said they could access loans of up to 50 percent of the value of their net pay…Interest rates of 5 percent a month are charged, excluding a service charge of $5.70 a month and an initiation fee of a maximum of 15 percent on the value of the loan…Miners told the *M&G* they settle outstanding amounts at the end of the year using their annual bonuses. Two miners said the high cost of finance did not worry them…clients will often repay their debt and take out another loan immediately, or one to two weeks later" (Bond, 2013: 582).

Bond's article identifies the problem the microfinance capital in the country and how it is leaving the working class drowning in debt. However this research went deeper on the topic of microfinance in examining the personal experiences of workers on how they deal with this issue given that it has become persistent in South African poor households. In addition to this, it can be noted that Bond's article was focused on miners who face financial struggles as they fight to sustain two households because most of them are migrants who left their families behind. This study on the other hand was more concerned on finding the dynamics of this particular issue on workers in the retail sector who are residing in the urban areas.

Informal networks and associations that require monthly contributions have become a fundamental tool in sustaining poor households. Stokvels for examples are one of the mechanisms that have been utilised with relations to social networks. This strategy has been identified as one of the most used strategies in a couple of studies (Mosoetsa, 2011; Narayan & Woodcock, 2003; Verhoef, 2009) and this research found the same thing but it goes further

to show how other dynamics like age and gender come to play when the working class utilities these sorts of mechanisms.

The studies by Mosoetsa (2011) and Fakier (2010) are very important in understanding the plight of households in South Africa, however they concentrate on KZN whereas my study examined the same issue but at a different setting, i.e. Gauteng, which is more urbanised and also it presents a lot of lifestyle opportunities compared to KZN meaning that the dynamics differ. Whereas Mosoetsa's study examined the dynamics of people who have lost jobs, this research on the other hand explored the currently active workers in retail, i.e. the working poor.

In neighbouring Zimbabwe the Economic Structural Programme (ESAP) that was introduced by the state saw the cut in government expenditure on health, education and other services previously subsidised by the state (the aim: to reduce state deficit which would enable government to settle its World Bank debt). Rapid inflation did not make the situation better as it left workers in a state of impoverishment. As a result of this, workers experienced low wages and this led them to adopt other strategies to survive. Rakodi reports that a significant portion of the working population was engaged in other informal sector activities. In Zimbabwe's third largest city Gweru, the working poor engaged in commercial agriculture so that they can be able to feed their households, crocheting and sewing for the local market or sell in neighbouring Botswana, hair plaiting became popular during non-work times as well as subletting of rooms. This is also applicable in the case of South Africa as Bezuidenhout & Fakir (2006) show that Maria a worker for the then subcontracted cleaning company at Wits University sewed clothes and sold them to Wits employees as a way to add on her salary.

The strategies outlined thus far falls under what can be termed diversification of livelihoods (Mosoetsa, 2011). The strategies used by the urban poor are not only reflected by getting

income into the household but also by trends of consumption for the household that can also be adjusted (Rakodi 1994). Consumption of meat and fish was reduced by the working poor in Rakodi's study and they also reduced the number of meals they have a day. Purchases of items deemed to be luxuries such as clothes were reduced as well as delaying or declining visits to health practitioners in some cases. In Bangladesh the urban working poor have turned to folk medicine that they can afford as a substitute of proper clinic medicine and they have also turned to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for help (Hossain, 2005). Worst case scenario the working poor has even withdrawn their children from school (Rakodi, 1994) or they sent them to live with relatives back in the rural areas (Mosoetsa, 2011). The utilisation of relatives has been referred to as 'clustering' which can also involve the increasing the size of the household (Mosoetsa, 2011). Clustering made up a substantial amount of this research as part of a survival strategy that the working poor utilise. This study examined how the nature and make-up of households contribute to the dynamics of livelihoods for the working poor. This follows from the point raised by Collins et al (2009) that family and community have become the world poor's greatest source of support.

We have seen from the above mentioned that the household comes up quite often and this study contributes to the knowledge of households by providing an analysis of how this institution can be fundamental in the livelihood of the urban working poor. In relation to this, Wallerstein & Smith (1992:254) assert that in a capitalist system, wages can never be the sole or even the principle mode of survival. They note that wages are clearly insufficient to cover the needs of a household in that they are too low and too sporadic. They say that wages must always be combined with other forms of income something this study seeks to further. In the same edition Beittel (1992:197) say that, "the preposition that the households of the urban working class in South Africa are sustained solely by wages has long been contradicted by evidence of non-wage sources of income". As a result of this they concluded that households

are acting as ‘income pooling units’ these days and therefore there is a need to reconceptualise the literature of incomes something that this study attempted to advance. According to Wallerstein & Smith (1992:7) “most individuals live on a daily basis within a ‘household’ which is what we term the entity responsible for our basic and continuing reproduction needs (food, shelter, clothing) and this household puts together a number of different kinds of ‘income’ in order to provide for these reproduction needs”. Since they described a household as an income pooling unit which derives its income from multiple sources it is therefore important to understand what Wallerstern and Smith call a household. A household is defined by the authors as a “grouping that assures some level of pooling income and sharing resources over time so as to reproduce the unit. Often the members of a household are biologically related and or share a common residence but sometimes not” (p.7). That being noted this study evaluated the multiple income strategies of household income pooling that the two authors purport with the aim of broadening the literature of households in South Africa.

Housing has proved to be a major challenge for the working poor as the urban rents are very high given their low wages. Rakodi (1994), Mosoetsa (2011) and Hossain (2005) have all shown that in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Bangladesh respectively the working poor usually overcrowd in small houses in order to curb the expensive rents of the big cities. In the US a fulltime Safeware (an insurance company) employee in California has turned to save up his earnings by staying in a shelter with his whole family. Some of the workers cannot afford to eat decent lunch, and hence they go to soup kitchens to get lunch. Writing on how households in Glen Norah a high density suburb in Zimbabwe’s capital city Harare survive in the infamous economic crisis of that country, Mukwedeya (2009) concludes that remittances that they receive from family members working abroad most notably in South Africa, Botswana, United Kingdom and Australia have played a pivotal role in the survival and livelihood

strategies of these households. In this study I capture the dynamics of strategies that are used by in Johannesburg working poor given its economic status in the country with the particular focus on retail sector workers and I show how networks have become pivotal in reducing the burden of housing expense for this group of people.

Land-Labour-Livelihood (LLL) Framework

The theoretical framework that shaped this research is the land-labour-livelihood framework. Topics on land, labour and livelihoods have been treated separately by scholars (Hart & Sitas, 2004) but this approach calls for the holistic treatment of the three facets in academic discourse and practice. Scully (2013) notes that a sole focus on each of these topics discounts the inter-link between the three facets hence there is a need to change this and adopt a more holistic approach that encompasses all of them. The connection between the three topics was stated in the work of Wallerstein and Smith (1992:12) who argued that "the appropriate operational unit for analysing the ways in which people fit into the 'labour' is not the individual but the 'household,'"

According to Scully (2013), the LLL framework in South African literature dates back to the days of Apartheid where scholars like Arrighi (1970), Wolpe (1972) and Legassick (1975) developed the subsidy thesis. The underlying idea of this proposition was that:

> "wage labourers in South Africa could be paid below the cost of reproduction because their reproduction was subsidised by non-wage forms of income earned by members of their extended household…this thesis was informed by a conceptualisation of labour that connected labour's wellbeing (and capitalist profits) not only to struggles in the factory and in the labour market, but also to broader networks of non-wage labour, especially those dependent on connections to land in rural areas…their attention to land-

> labour-livelihood connection led them to argue that to understand not only the well-being of the working class, but the trajectory of labour movements, scholars had to pay attention to remittance flows, family and household structure, and rural linkages" (Scully, 2013:93-94).

The Apartheid state policies made it possible for this group of scholars to pursue the LLL literature in the 1970s and 1980s and spread it (Scully, 2013). However in the 1990s and 2000s LLL disappeared in the South African literature with scholars now focusing on labour movements in what Scully (2013) terms the "public turn". During the public turn scholars shifted their focus on the South African trade union dynamism and this was against a vibrant labour movement in the 1980s extended its agenda to tackle issues of politics and economic policy i.e. going beyond the traditional shop-floor affairs. This movement experienced victory when it achieved non-racial democracy but as time passed it was unable to protect workers against neoliberal reforms which saw new forms of work and loss of decent work. During this period getting into the 2000s labour scholars' attention was tuned towards the strategies and tactics that the unions had to adopt in response to this wave of new policies. Webster & Adler (1999) did a study in search of new strategies of uniting the divided working force and some scholars went into evaluating the labour unions (von Holdt & Webster, 2008) whilst others shifted their focus to the failures and the weaknesses of unionism (Buhlungu, 2009, Seekings & Natrass, 2005, Barcheisi, 2007).

According to Scully, the public turn has not really advanced the options in the discourse of labour movements but its sole focus on wage labour has seen a stalemate between optimists and the pessimists. The former continue to see labour movements as important actors in the emancipation of the poor whereas the latter see unions as obstacles and thus they concentrate on "pro-poor developmental outcomes" like strengthening organisation of non-workers. He shows the importance of the LLL framework by saying that (p.97):

> "The South African literature of the 1970s presents a potential model for moving beyond this stalemate. While the current literature has thoroughly examined the effects of wage labour's decline on labour organisations, there has been less focus on how workers, their households, and their livelihoods have been affected….if scholars had maintained the South African literature's traditional focus on LLL connections, it would have guided them toward different sets of questions about the effects of formal wage's decline. Such a refocusing would push scholars to focus not simply on union strategies or on inequalities between employed and unemployed, but the redistributive networks that are the core of the labour-livelihood connection."

Scully (2013) has thus demonstrated that the there is a dire need for scholars to adopt the LLL framework that has been absent in recent times and this is exactly what this study did. I attempted to close in on the gap between land-labour-livelihood. However it is worth noting that my study is biased towards labour and livelihood in that I did not include the land aspect to it as this would be more applicable to rural livelihood whereas my study was solely focused on urban livelihood and I also did not dwell on the workers' rural connections.

LLL on the other hand there has been re-emerging in the sociological literature of South Africa with a number of scholars making strides in the resuscitation of this line of thought (Scully, 2013). Mosoetsa (2011), Webster et al (2006) and Fakier and Cock (2009) are some of the scholars who are contributing to the re-emergence of this line of thinking. According to Scully (2013:98) "this emerging body of work demonstrates that the relationship between land, labour and livelihood remains dynamic and important to understanding the well-being of workers" and this study is also part of this re-emergence of LLL discourse.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The way in which research is conducted is fundamental for every study because this is the procedure used to answer the research question and address the objectives of the study. This chapter provides an explanation of the research design, the research instrumentation, sampling procedure, data collection techniques, the research experience as well as the data analysis. Ethical considerations that were taken into account when administering the research will be outlined and then the chapter closes with the limitation of the methodology used.

Research Location

The study was conducted in the city of Johannesburg (and also included some areas in the East Rand) in the province of Gauteng in South Africa. Out of the nine provinces in the country, Gauteng is the smallest province in terms of surface area but the biggest in terms of GDP and population. Johannesburg is the most populous city in the country with migrants coming from all corners of the country and other neighbouring and beyond countries' citizens moving into the city. This city is popular for attracting labourers dating back from the time when minerals like gold were discovered during the Gold Rush of the late 19th century. As mining activities grew in this city; employment opportunities rose significantly and eventually the economy of the city expanded as well. With the economy growing, job opportunities became vast as well in other sectors and industries and as a result of this the city became a destination of riches and opportunities. This has led the city to be dubbed Egoli (meaning a place of gold/ *plek van goud).*

Research Site and Field Experience

Initially I had intended to do my research at the Rosebank Shopping Mall with the employees of the Pick 'n' Pay branch there. However due to logistical and time constraints I ended up doing my research with participants of three different Pick 'n' Pay branches i.e. Yeoville, Steeledale and South Kensington, where the company's Gauteng head office is located. The interviews for this study were not conducted on one site. Rather they were conducted at a place that was most suitable for the participants. Due to the busy manner of the workplace, the bulk of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. I had to travel to Soweto (Tladi, Naledi and Meadowlands), Hillbrow, Yeoville, Voslorus, Braamfontein and Katlehong to conduct the interviews. There were a couple of interviews that were conducted at Steeledale Shopping Centre which is situated in the South East of the CBD where there is a Pick 'n' Pay Hypermarket. As mentioned before the interviews were conducted at times that were conducive for the participants. For instance, all interviews conducted at their homes were done during their free time, i.e. when they were off-duty and when they were on their work breaks. More on this will be discussed further in this chapter on the section that deals with the ethics. Since I am not South African, I got help from a friend who is a local and well-grounded with the city and the country at large. He helped me move around and identify informants. More on this will be discussed further on the sampling section of this chapter.

Research Design

Research design can be referred to as the structure of enquiry (De Vaus, 2001). It is a "logical task undertaken to ensure that the evidence collected enables us to answer questions or to test theories as unambiguously as possible" (De Vaus, 2011:16). This study adopted a qualitative approach. Lewis (2003) defined the qualitative approach as a realistic revelatory method concerned with understanding the meaning which people assign to occurrences in their social

realm. The qualitative method sanctions the researcher to delve into elusive and obscure dimensions of life. This means that by using the qualitative approach, the researcher's interpretation of meanings behind activity is the one that generates knowledge. On qualitative research design, Neuman (2006) argues that human beings have reason, motives and awareness therefore they should not be treated like objects of study. That argument follows up on the differentiation between the qualitative and quantitative way of doing research.

Whereas the quantitative approach entails that valid knowledge is fashioned by our ability to measure and discern factually, the qualitative research is centred in the interpretative methodology that was argued for by Neuman above. Since this study's was aimed at looking at the experiences of retail sector workers against the backdrop of low wages as a result of labour market flexibility, the qualitative approach is the one that would have made it necessary to collect data that would dig into their experiences. The experiences of these workers are bound to be different as a result of their backgrounds, their age, gender, social networks etc. therefore it was the qualitative approach that had the authority to dig deeper into this issue of differing experiences.

The qualitative research design was preferred to the quantitative one because of the nature of the later to quantify things. As mentioned above this study aimed at exploring the experiences of retail workers and these different experiences cannot be quantified as it is the manner in which quantitative designs are tackled. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to investigate issues that include thoughts, perceptions and attitudes as well as understanding the meaning of some behaviours of social reality (Neuman, 2006). This is exactly what this study intended to do, i.e. understanding the reality of retail workers and how this group of workers tackles their financial and personal woes that stem from their involvement in the labour market.

De Vaus, et al (2005) articulate that an approach that is qualitative in nature permits the research process to be flexible. This is one of the reasons why this line of enquiry became useful for this particular research because I was looking at workers in a range of jobs within supermarkets. In as much as the focus was on lower grade workers, the participants had different job titles ranging from merchandisers, cashiers, till operators, storeroom, customer services, switchboard operators, etc. This meant that the way I would approach data collection from the different participants will require alterations here and there since the experiences of a switchboard operator will definitely be different from those of a cashier hence the qualitative way allowed me be flexible when dealing with the participants. Other variables like gender, marital status, and area of residence and education backgrounds were also taken into consideration because the survival strategies used by people can also depend on them therefore the qualitative approach made it easier take these into account during the investigation process. In simpler terms, the qualitative research methods allowed me to probe when I felt it necessary during the time when I was dealing with informants.

Interviews and observation are the two qualitative methods that were used to gather information for this study and these two are going to be discussed further later in this chapter.

Population

The population of a research refers to the pool from which the units of those who are going to take part in the study are taken from. This comprises of every other unit that fits the depiction even if it might not be picked up for the specific study (Newman, 2006). For this research the population was basically workers who are employed by Pick ‘n’ Pay. However to suit the topic of survival strategies the research was more specifically focused on employees who work at the lower level and shop floor meaning that those in management at the upper and paying jobs were not up for consideration. Due to the nature of the research and the time

constraints, the pool was reduced from the whole of Pick 'n' Pay to workers from the three stores that were mentioned above. Therefore it was not a representative sample of the population. Unfortunately I was unable to obtain a list of employees, therefore the sampling was qualitative and non-representative (see below).

The variables that were taken into consideration for the partakers in the research included age range, level of education, area of upbringing, current area of residence, span of employment at the moment, gender and marital status. These dynamics had an influence on the survival strategies that are adopted by the workers.

Sampling

Since this study was purely qualitative, it utilised the non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability method entails that elements of the population cannot be accurately determined that they will be selected (Marshall, 1996) as in the case of probability sampling. Non-probability sampling was used for this research because I was unable to obtain a list of employees from which to conduct a representative sample because I had to access the employees individually rather than through management. Two sampling strategies that fall under the non-probability technique were used for this study and these are purposive and snowball.

Purposive Sampling

The sample that was used for this study was selected using purposive sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling. Neuman (2001) describes purposive sampling as the deliberate selection of participants with set experience or information that is needed by the researcher. Babie & Mouton (2001) states that the participants in purposive are selected according to the judgement of the researcher who will be committed at selecting only the

participants that will best enhance her/his study therefore this is also known as judgmental sampling. For this study I selected participants, who suited particular criteria, i.e. they must have been working in the retail sector for Pick ‘n’ Pay during the period when the research was conducted. Selection was mainly based on availability of participants so most of the participants’ variables came up after I had already recruited them. However, I notified my contact that helped me with the recruitment process prior that I wanted workers on a low pay scale because they were the ones suitable for the study. According to Crossman (2013) purposive sampling is used mostly when a researcher wants to quickly identify her/his participants and also when she/he cannot get a sampling framework.

Snowball Sampling

In as much as purposive sampling was used to kick-start the research process, most of the sample was determined via snowball sampling. In this sampling method, current or existing participants of the study help to recruit future participants from their acquaintances. This strategy is also known as referral sampling, chain sampling or chain-referral sampling because of its nature (Goodman, 1961). For this study I initially had three participants that I had identified through purposive sampling and they work at Steeledale and Yeoville Pick ‘n’ Pay. After interviewing them I then asked if they could help me find more participants from their workmates and other people whom they know who work for the store. As a result of that search, they either gave me contacts of the requested participants or they introduced me to them and this process continued as the recruited participants would help mobilise more participants. This is how I used snowball sampling for this study.

The Participants

A total of 15 people took part in this study. These included 13 shopfloor lower and middle grade workers of Pick 'n' Pay Steeledale and Yeoville. The thirteen comprised of cashiers, till operators, customer services, merchandisers, shelf-packers, a checkout assistant, a general assistant, kitchen assistant, bakery assistant, a stockroom controller and one who works in the cell phone department. These people (please refer to Table 1) were suitable for this study because they are basically in low paying jobs hence they were the perfect people to shed more light on their survival experiences given their low wages. The other two participants were not low grade workers but were those who are middle to upper grade workers. One is a pricing analyst and the other is an assistant manager in the promotions and marketing department. The reason to include these two was based on the idea that these would come in with a different dimension to the issue. I wanted to find out how their experiences differ from the others. Their input was of utmost importance for the study because they brought in a different perspective to the research and this can be seen in the findings and analysis chapter.

Out of the 15 participants, six were male and nine were female. Having both genders was essential for the study as this can be one variable that influences how the workers survive. It can be common knowledge that the survival strategies used by people of different genders can differ and part of this study also wanted to know how these strategies differ in a big city like Johannesburg. In terms of age, the research participants came from across different age ranges. One female who participated is in her 50s, and another is in her 40s but the majority of the respondents are in the 20s and 30s. Selection based on marital status was not a big issue but marriage became one of the most important themes that came up as I interacted with the participants as it shall be seen in the chapter of analysis. But let me just mention at the moment that the sample comprised of both single and married people with only one lady who

is a widow. Other characteristics of the participants including their families and level of education will appear in subsequent chapters.

Table 1: Participants

Name*	**Gender**	**Occupation/Department**	**Place of Interview**	**Date of Interview**
Mathepelo	Female	Cellphone Department	Tladi, Soweto (her home)	09/03/2014
Lerato	Female	Cashier	Meadowlands, Soweto (her home	09/03/2014
Palesa	Female	Promotions and marketing	Tladi, Soweto (her home)	09/03/2014
Patrick	Male	Customer services	Steeledale Shopping Centre	15/03/2014
Ruby	Female	Kitchen	Steeledale Shopping Centre	15/03/2014
Mzwandile	Male	Bakery assistant	Steeledale Shopping Centre	15/03/2014
Kate	Parcel Counter	Female	Steeledale Shopping Centre	17/03/2014
Nozipho	Till operator	Female	Kathlehong (her home)	21/03/2014
Tsholofelo	Merchandiser	Female	Voslorus (her home)	21/03/2014
Zandile	Merchandiser/shelf packer	Female	Yeoville (her home)	23/03/2014
Ayanda	Merchandiser	Female	Yeoville (her home)	23/03/2014
Thomas	General assistant	Male	Steeledale Shopping Centre	19/04/2014
Thabang	Stockroom Controller	Male	Steeledale Shopping Centre	19/04/2014
Daniel	Checkpoint assistant	Male	Braamfontein	12/04/2014
Tshepo	Pricing analyst	Male	Braamfontein	27/04/2014

* Names are all pseudonyms

In-depth Interviews

Interviews are one of the most popular methods that are used in qualitative social science research. Weiss (1994) says interviews allow the researcher to get first-hand information regarding the nature of social life. He adds on that interviews are necessary when a researcher wants to develop a description and knowing more about how events are interpreted. In-depth interviews allow us to get to places where non-indepth interviews cannot reach. They give the researcher first-hand information that will be coming from the horse's mouth i.e. the interviewee. "In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation" (Boyce & Neale, 2006:3).

According to Boyce & Neale (2006) in-depth interviews are appropriate we want to explore new issues and when we want detailed information about people's thoughts and behaviours.

Taking this into consideration, this study utilised in-depth interviews with the respondents. In-depth interviews allowed me to uncover the dynamics of the survival strategies used by the retail sector workers who took part in the study. It helped a lot in that some of the issues that were raised by the participants needed close attention and digging more into some issues that were coming up as the interviews progressed. This would not have been able to be done if I had done a closed interview which has limits in terms of the responses.

All interviews were carried out in English. The participants were competent in speaking the language. They could hear and speak it hence communication was not a big issue there. All interviews were tape recorded because "it leaves the interviewer free to concentrate on the interview itself and it eliminates problems of memory failure and of selectivity by the interviewer" (Belson, 1967:253). The tape recorder was used as a research tool but the most essential tool for this study was the interview schedule and this will be discussed further in the next subsection.

Interview Schedule: The Research Tool

To collect information from the participants an interview schedule was used. This consisted of questions that were open-ended to allow the participants to dwell deeper into their thoughts and experiences in retail sector waged labour (Bryman, 2004). According to Bryman (2004), interviews of this sort have the ability to generate densely detailed descriptions that allow the investigator to acquire a deeper understanding and meanings that the respondents attach to various social processes. The interview schedule was standard in that the questions on it applied to every participant. However since these workers have different jobs, are from different genders and age ranges, different marital status, from different residential areas, education backgrounds, etc., the interview was flexible in that it allowed me to probe the participants along these variables when they came up. As the research progressed, the interview schedule was being refined along the way.

Observation

Another qualitative method that has been used by social scientists is observation. It involves observing phenomena or actions in a natural setting (Baker, 2006). Baker (2006) states that when using this form of data gathering the researcher either assumes the role of an absolute observer or participant observer. Observation was not really part of this study, but I conducted seven of the fifteen interviews at the interviewees' homes and with one of the dominant survival strategies being accommodation and living arrangements. Therefore I had the opportunity to observe how the participants lived, the type of accommodation they stay in and the environment they are in.

Data Analysis

Interviews for these studies were tape recorded and transcribed and after that thematic analysis was used. Clarke (2006) notes that thematic analysis is an important element in data analysis especially when doing studies regarding human behaviour. According to Guest (2012) this form of analysis is the most common in social science qualitative research. When utilising this method of analysis for this study, I categorised the data, familiarised myself with it and paid particular attention to the patterns that were occurring. I then started to document where and how patterns occurred by generating initial codes from the data then reduce and compile data. After that I started reviewing the themes, defining and naming them. The phases are followed here are the ones that make up thematic analysis. Guest (2012) and Braun & Clarke (2006) note that there are a couple of advantages for using thematic analysis. A benefit of thematic analysis is that it allows the findings to be generated out of the interview material (inductively). For this study, the system helped in the writing of the research report. Interpretive techniques were used in the analysis process specifically coding which helped in segmenting the data into the respective themes presented. The themes that can be found in chapter 5 and 6 of this report are a result of utilising the thematic analysis. In terms of data presentation, I placed the findings within previous theory and research.

Ethical Consideration

There were no vulnerable groups that were included in this study, but since I was dealing with human beings, it was mandatory that I had to take ethical issues into consideration. The research adhered to the principles of the University of the Witwatersrand Non-Medical Ethics Committee which gave me the permission to continue with the study by giving me a Ethics Clearance. Ethical considerations for this study was influenced by Wassenaar (2006) who give a nice outline of what ethical issues that must be considered when carrying out research.

An information sheet was given to every participant of this study. This sheet provided appropriate information of the study so that the participants know all about the study. This is essential in the sense that participants know the nature of the study and the consequences of taking part in the study and that the participants fully understand what they are getting into. The sheet also informed the participants that taking part in this study was on the basis of voluntarism and that they had the right to decline being part of the study or they could withdraw at any point they felt like. This forms part of what can be referred to as informed consent. In addition to this informants were notified that this research is purely for the purpose getting a university degree and no rewards were to be given for participating in the study.

On the consent form I also asked for the permission to use a tape recorder. Pseudonyms were names were used in the research report and on interview transcripts and this were done in order to achieve confidentiality and anonymity on all participants. I made sure that all participants were over the age of 18 years which is the legal age of deciding for oneself.

Methodological Limitations

There are a couple of methodological limitations that I identified when carrying out this study that I thought will be worth mentioning. The first weakness of the methodology was the use of snowball sampling. As a result of this strategy, there are concerns over the bias of the sample. Since the participants referred the researcher to other potential participants, it ran the risk that the sample would have similar characteristics and perhaps ignore others who might have information that is different. In order to curb this potential difficulty, I tried the best that I could to organise participants without the help of my existing ones. Thus some of the informants were recruited outside the snowball sample. With regards to this I personally

approached some participants at the Steeledale hypermarket, and I was able to recruit a couple of participants using this method.

The sample was relatively small and this means that the findings of this study cannot be used to generalise the perception of the whole retail sector workers nor was I able to conduct a representative sample. With regards to this I therefore suggest that for further studies a bigger sample be used if there is a need to generalise the findings.

The issue of language was also a limitation for this study. The interviewees' first language ranged from isiXhosa, isiZulu, seSotho, seTswana, sePedi and Xitsonga. In as much they understand English and speak properly, it is not their first language and therefore there were some other expressions they could not communicate properly, something they could have done better if they had used their vernacular languages. At the same time I cannot speak their first language but I tried my best to use simple English that they understood.

The use of a tape recorder also acted as a weakness during data collection. Some of the interviewees were not comfortable with the presence of a tape recorder during the interview. For instance one interview started talking a lot after the interview when the gadget was switched off. One-on-one interviews proved to be a disadvantage given the issue that was being discussed because participants are not willing to disclose their salaries and financial status. This issue was dealt with in that for ethical reasons I did not probe the participants further but I asked questions regarding their spending patterns, what they own in terms of assets. This therefore helped me in getting a sense of the participants' economic status.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENERAL CONSENSUS: THE SALARY DOES NOT CATER FOR THE WORKER'S NEEDS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the general perception of the workers who took part in the study with regards to the wages they are currently getting in the retail sector. Following the question of whether the salaries employees in the retail sector getting are enough to cater for their needs, the theme presented in this chapter revolves around low remuneration in the retail sector. The discussion presented in this chapter will be based on the responses of the interviewees who took part in this study in relation to the issue. The reasons behind why these people seek employment in the low paying retail sector will be detailed according to the respondents, and in addition to this I will also touch on the labour market histories of the respondents with the aim of laying a foundation on the pressing issue that this research was interested in. The subtheme of 'the importance of work' forms an essential part of the chapter and by linking it with the subtheme of low wages, it will follow on Webster's (2011:160) findings that "the wages are low but they are better than nothing." This argument can also be found in the work of the likes of Olifant (2010) who expressed the desperation that people face in their quest of earning a living. The chapter basically gives background to the issue at stake before the succeeding one examines the central theme, that of the survival strategies used by the workers.

Low Remuneration in the Retail Sector

Many scholars, researchers and politicians have spoken stridently on the issue of low wages not only in South Africa but the world at large. Some have gone as far as to explain this situation as a crisis and there has been a call from think tanks and international organizations including ILO to improve the circumstances of the labour force through the elevation of wages as this subject might have societal repercussions that can be detrimental if it is not attended to. In fact we could view the Marikana case of 2012 which led to 44 fatalities, 34 of the deceased being the striking miners as well in this vein. The concern of wages was a cornerstone of this study hence it would be sensible to start with what came out of the research with regards to the issue. All the respondents who participated in this research had to respond to questions about the adequacy of the salaries they are getting in their current jobs. The reason for this was to grasp the perceptions of the employees in relation to this as it would later save as the guideline of the succeeding questions of the interviews.

Failure of Wages to Cover For Basic Needs

There has been a general accord by the workers interviewed that the salaries they are getting are not adequate enough to cater for their needs. Most of the employees interviewed confirmed that they find it difficult to afford basic necessities in life because the salaries they are getting are too low. There were diverse issues that were highlighted by the respondents in that they have different needs in life so what was being raised in the interviews depended on what the employees regarded as essential. Rental, utility bills and other essentials are some of the elements that make life for these workers difficult in that they barely afford these costs and when they do they will be left with little money to settle other things that might be

important. Ayanda[1] a Merchandiser at Pick 'n' Pay Yeoville explained why her salary is not adequate by mentioning that;

> *"I cannot afford to pay rent in this city therefore I have to compromise. My spending is definitely aimed at cheap quality stuff, but the problem is that even though the stuff is cheap, it quickly needs replacements so I will be buying things like clothes most of the time because the ones that I can afford quickly tore."* (Interview: Ayanda; 23/03/2014).

Ayanda is renting a two bedroom flat in Berea which is costing her R3000 per month and this is difficult for her considering the workers' salaries which are below R5000 but she told me how she is managing the situation, and this will be covered in chapter 5 of this research report. This sentiment was shared by a lot of interviewees:

> *"I still can't afford a lot of things that I want. As you can see I stay in a small house, I would like to stay in a bigger place, but the salary I am getting now is not enough for me to go and stay in a bigger place. This is what I can afford" (Interview*: Mathapelo; 09/03/2014).

> *It is not enough because I cannot afford a lot of things that I need in life… I cannot afford to buy my own house like other people do.* (Interview: Mzwandile; 15/03/2014).

> *"You struggle with this pay it is too low. It's a struggle to survive* (Interview: Kate; 17/03/2014).

> *"When I pay rent, most of the salary will go"* (Interview: Daniel; 12/04/2014).

[1] All names used for interviewees for this research report are pseudonyms.

The workers are mostly concerned with essential and basic things in life. They are not worried about the luxury goods; all they are saying is that their salaries are too low to an extent that they are struggling to elevate their lives to that which is more respectable because most of the salary only meets the basic necessities (especially rent) and there is nothing more they can do with it. However, the pressing issue behind all this lies in the rising prices of commodities over the years whereas the salaries of the workers remain stagnant. The inflation rate of most countries has been skyrocketing much to the apprehension of the workers whose salaries are not following the same trend. Statistics SA (2014) has reported that the inflation rate of the country has been gradually increasing in the first quarter of the year 2014. The national statistical service of the country reported that in December 2013 the inflation rate was pegged at 5.3%, then increased to 5.4% in January 2014, then rocketed to 5.8% in the following month and by April it had reached 6%. The salaries, not only of those working in the retail industry but for most South African labourers have been outplayed by rising food and other basic commodities prices as a result of the inflation rate. This is because when inflation rises, the general level of prices of goods and services rises meaning that the cost of living will rise as well since the purchasing power of a unit of currency will be reduced (Wijesekera, 2011). According to StatsSA (2014) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of June 2014 indicated that the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages have been increasing at an annual rate of 8.8%. If one zeros in to specific increase rates of basic necessities the CPI will show that prices of essential food stuff like bread milk, eggs, have been increasing steadily. The workers who participated in this study confirmed that it has been difficult for them to keep up with household expenses. Tsholofelo who works for Pick ‘n’ Pay Steeledale as a Merchandiser also raised a point that goes in line with this issue as she complained about her salary not keeping up with the rising cost of living. She said that

"...basic things prices are going up and our salaries are not being increased so the money we are getting cannot be enough. We struggle a lot to afford things we need in life. Surviving on that salary is very difficult... ..I once got a raise but as time went by food prices and other stuff started to go up and the salary was not going up, so I went back to square one." (Interview: Tsholofelo; 21/03/2014).

"I am struggling to live life the way that I would want to because the things are just so expensive. The prices for the food and transport are just going up all the time but my pay is not doing the same. Its like when I get the money, all of it is gone to buy grocery and taking care of the kids transport to go to school and back. After all this I am not left with some just to keep for emergency you know there are things that may just come in life that are unplanned." (Interview: Lerato; 09/03/2014).

The above statement unravels the struggles that workers in this country currently face and this is something that kept on coming out of most of the interviews. The price of rent in the Joburg CBD, Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville areas ranges from R3000 to R5000 and it is in these areas that a lot of the participants stay including Ayanda. The price of bread is around R10 a loaf, a kilogram of meat is in the region of R60. A 2kg packet of rice is costing around R30 as well as stuff like toilet paper, eggs, milk, household cleaning accessories. Groceries for the month may cost an average citizen up to R1500. Here we can note that rent and groceries alone are taking up an average of R5 000 for these workers who are getting an estimate of R3000 to R5000 per month. In addition to this workers have to pay for the school fees of their children and in the cases of others workers who are still young they also want to further their education so they have to take care of that bill as well as other utility bills like electricity which costs about R500 a month. Most of the workers in the retail sector are young

people who are just starting to find their feet after staying with parents and relatives therefore they are in a stage whereby they are still buying household items like appliances which will make them dig deeper into their pockets.

Patrick an employee who works for Pick ‘n’ Pay in Customer Services made it clear that he is beginning to establish himself in the city as an adult from the rural areas but he is finding it difficult to be able to purchase furniture. He said that:

> *“since I started working, I moved out of my aunt’s place where I was staying and I am now staying on my own. But now the thing is I am struggling to put nice furniture in the house because it is so expensive to put things into the house because I am not earning much now*” (Interview: Patrick; 15/03/2014).

Daniel another young man originally from North West who is trying to establish himself in Johannesburg said:

> *“I cannot afford to buy a car or a house as I want. With my pay I cannot even qualify for a lot of loans that other people can that make them purchase these things.”* (Interview: Daniel; 12/04/2014).

From this it can be said that the low wages that are being offered to the workers in the retail sector have been making life difficult especially for the younger workers. Thabang, a Stockroom Controller at Steeledale Mall Pick ‘n’ Pay shared this thought of doing something more with his remuneration rather than buying just the essential goods of survival but investing in education. Answering to the question if his salary was enough to cater for his needs, Thabang said;

> *“It is just not enough nje. There are a lot of things I am not able to do with that. For an example like now I am not able to afford my studies and cannot afford a*

lot of things at the same time. So there are a lot of things I have to sacrifice." (Interview: Thabang; 19/04/2014).

Failure of Wages to Secure Long-Term Investment

However in as much basic necessities were raised incessantly by the participants, the research found out that there are other things that the retail sector workers want to use their salaries for that go beyond these. This finding also converges with what James (2012) found when she did a study on the dynamics of indebtedness in South African households. According to James the African poor do not fall into debt because of the purchase of expensive luxury goods like branded clothes, top of the range cars amongst other flashy goods. She says that most are falling into debt due to long term investments that are deemed necessary for an example, paying for education, marriage and unfortunate events like funerals.

However unlike in the cases shown by James (2012) of turning to credit in order to pay for his studies, Thabang said that he has not thought much into how he is going to pay for his studies. From what Thabang said I got a sense of lost hope in that he is no longer looking for ways he can fund his studies and the same was shared by another interviewee Patrick whom in high school had a dream of studying Science in university said:

"I wanted to study Science but I could not because the family could not afford the fees for the colleges…I had hoped to get a job that will make me earn some money so that I can pay for the college because I have heard that a lot of people have done it but I found myself getting a pay that makes it impossible for me to do this...I still want to go to college but for now I do not know how I will be able to do it" (Interview: Patrick; 14/04/2014).

Education came out as one of the most important aspects of this study. The two cases of Thabang and Patrick show how wages evaporates the desire of continuing with education for people working in low income jobs. I asked the interviewees why they did not continue with their education after matric (since it is a level that most of them finished). The responses was that most of them did not meet the requirements of getting into tertiary education or that their families could not afford to pay for the educational advancement be it university or some form of Technikon. It is the latter that makes the issue of wages interesting in that those who said that their families could not afford education were asked why they are not using their salaries for such because one of the reasons why they are in those jobs is that they lack an education. So the rational of the question was that why not pay for education so that they can score themselves as decent job. Responding to that question, Kate said:

> *"With this salary? No I would want a better job and do school for it because I know I can do better in life if I do that. But with my salary if I start paying for the school, it will not be enough to pay for other things. Already there is a lot I am paying for…like the bills and fees for the young ones"* (Interview: Kate; 17/03/2014).

Some other long-term cultural investments are being made difficult to make for these workers and this is mostly in the case of the much younger workers who are struggling to start a life due their low remuneration. These concerns were raised by Mzwandile who said that:

> *"The pay is not enough because I cannot afford a lot of things that I need in life. I cannot buy myself nice clothes to make myself look good; I cannot afford to buy my own house like other people do. As a man you need to own a house or houses like what our fathers did. I also want to marry my girlfriend who I have been going out with for a couple of years now. I cannot do that*

because I cannot raise money for lobola with the money I am getting here. She is still staying at her parents' house with our child and I think we should be stay as a family the three of us." (Interview: Mzwandile; 15/03/2014).

There are three things of interest that come out of the concerns raised by Mzwandile. The first one is he has a desire to make a long-term investment like a house but he is being stopped to pursue this dream of becoming a house owner because he does not have adequate income that will allow him to make such an enormous purchase. Mzwandile confirmed that the thought that he will not be able to own a house in the near future bothers him a lot and I came to a conclusion here that the low wages being offered to not only retail sector workers but all the working class in South Africa can have a negative psychological effect on workers as they fail to achieve what they want. A lot of those who participated in this study confirmed that the money they are getting concerns them a lot which makes this issue a subject which needs to be attended to.

The gender dynamics of low-pay in the retail sector is the second point that can be identified from Mzwandile's quote. The statement "as a man you have to own a house like our fathers did" shows that the men who are getting low-wages in the retail sector are under societal pressure as their roles and expectations are altered because of their low remuneration. The men from African society have been the traditional breadwinners of the households but with rising costs of living, it is the ones who are getting low wages who suffer from distress due societal expectations. This point can be substantiated by what Thomas said:

"it is rough you see when you are like the head of the house like me. The wife and child look up at me to do buy them things and look after all their financial needs and man it can be rough" (Interview: Thomas; 19/04/2014).

This finding seems to confirm other work which has linked notions of masculinity to changing opportunities around employment (Ritcher & Morell, 2006). Going back to Mzwandile's quotation it can be noted that the third point of interest is that he said is unable to get married because he is finding it hard to raise money for lobola[2] as he is not earning much. The practice of lobola is very important for the people in Southern Africa and in as much of the traditional cultural practices are fading away with Westernization coming into the picture. This particular practice has stood the test of time therefore it is still very much relevant to that society (Ansell, 2010). However the problem now is that men like Mzwandile here who are getting very little wages find themselves in a dilemma whereby they want to fulfill this cultural practice but at the same time they are not in a position to afford it. Therefore I argue here that not only do low wages have effects on the financial wellbeing of people, it has an impact on other societal practices that have cultural meaning to the people.

Lack of Benefits

With workers reporting that their salaries are very low to such an extent that they cannot afford a living, it leaves benefits as the only way to better their livelihood. Most literature covering the subjects of employee benefits has been written in a way that shows how these benefits profit the company. Research in Human Resources and Industrial Psychology shows that employee benefits are a source of job motivation for the workers and they in turn increase productivity in the company as confirmed by Mathauer & Imhoff (2006). However some scholars like Marais (2010) and Standing (1999) have brought in a moral element to the disbursement of employee benefits. They say that with workers getting very low salaries these days, it means that they cannot afford other things that might be essential in life like health care, education for their off-springs and themselves in some instances, since the salary

[2] A traditional custom whereby the man pays the family of his fiancée for her hand in marriage practiced in Southern Africa usually in the form of cash or livestock (Ansell, 2010). Elsewhere in the world it can be referred to as the "bride price"

could be finished by purchasing clothes, food, paying for accommodation, utility bills and transport. Increasingly neither the state nor the employers pay this and this is foisted back to the poor workers to cover (Marais, 2010).

This research showed that there are not much employee benefits to talk about that are offered in the retail sector or more specifically by the company that employs the workers interviewed for the study. The piece by Kenny (2001) on flexibility in the retail showed that there was a huge difference in the benefits received by workers in the sector depending on their status of employment. In that study she shows that casual and subcontracted workers in South African retail earn far much less than their permanent colleagues in terms of wages and benefits. 94% of permanent workers in Kenny's (2001) study confirmed that they received benefits in the form of pension or provident fund or a wage bonus. However I show in this study that nothing has changed thirteen years on since that article was published despite the call from unions and academics to rethink and strategize these arrangements in such a way that will be inclusive to all workers despite their form of employment. The gap between the remuneration package between casual and permanent is still evident as this study shows through the statement by Thomas a casual worker at Pick 'n' Pay:

> *"I am casual. I want to be permanent because I see my friend who is also permanent is getting more money but we do mostly similar things at work."* (Interview: Thomas; 19/04/2014).

I argue here that not only is the situation still the same for the workers in casual employment arrangements, but it has become worse and worse over the years. I say this because in Kenny's (2001) article she found that casual workers in retail were working an average time of 19.7 hours per week. In this study however, Thomas a casual worker said, "I work 45 hours per week depending on the needs of the store." This might mean that the casual worker

is required to do more as compared to a couple of years ago whereas he/she is not being elevated in terms of his/her wage package as it can be noted that salaries are still a major issue. The interesting thing is that these types of workers want to work more hours because it will mean that they will earn more come payday.

However most of the workers interviewed for this study are permanent employees of the retailer. But in as much as 94% of the permanent staff in Kenny's study received benefits (Kenny, 2001), this is not enough to cater for their immediate needs and survival as most of the benefits are targeted towards the long-term for an example the pension fund. Some of the bonuses have been either deemed unnecessary by the workers or some of them do not apply to them. Lerato who works as a cashier at Pick 'n' Pay Steeledale spoke negatively of benefits. She confirmed that she was not getting enough benefits and she also mentioned that the company offers loans to them but she said that the process of getting it was difficult and she has not been successful in her attempt. The workers for the store are eligible for discounts when they purchase goods from the store as part of their employee benefits. The staff discount of goods is not enough to elevate the workers out of poverty and make them happy. Lerato said:

> *"there is staff discount when you purchase grocery from the shop. It is okay but it does not do much to me because I want money to be in the pocket so that I can pay for other things."* (Interview: Lerato; 09/03/2014).

One of the Pick 'n' Pay worker benefits which do not apply to a lot of workers is the Employee Bursary Scheme. This is a bursary which is given to tertiary students whose parents are employees for the company. The reason why I say that it does not apply to a lot of workers is that most of the workers employed in the retail sector are young adults as it can be confirmed by the sample of this study so there is a limited chance that they would have had

children who are already in tertiary. There are some cases where it is possible for this to happen, but as well it is difficult in that one of the requirements for a student to get this bursary is that she/he should be in her/his second year of study. So for those workers who have children in that age range, they should first get them through first year or at least find some other funding for the studies in order for them to be considered only in the second of study. The average tuition fees (alone minus accommodation and upkeep) across South African Universities for Undergraduate programs is about R40 000 per year a figure which is close to impossible for the workers to attain. Therefore I hereby argue that this is a very limited benefit.

In as much as there was a general consensus that the salaries are low as the majority of the workers take home a salary between R3 000 and R5 000, it is worth noting that not all those were interviewed agreed to this. I argue here that it is the workers on the lower grade[3] who subscribe to this consensus because those on a middle and upper grade jobs are actually content with the salaries they are getting at Pick 'n' Pay. This argument is supported by what two interviewees who fall under this category of work said in their interviews. Palesa who works in the marketing department of the store was very positive of her remuneration and she demonstrated positive energy in that she revealed optimism and faith towards her job throughout the interview something that lacked in most of the interviews conducted with the other workers of a lower grade. Speaking optimistically about the issue, she responded to the question whether the salary she was getting was adequate by saying that;

> "*Now I do I think it does. I am a single mother and I have been able to pay for my son's school fees, who just started grade one this year. He gets everything he wants and I am sure by the time he gets to later grades I will be better off because of the*

[3] By lower grade I mean those workers who work on the shopfloor and others who do menial jobs. By upper grade workers I am referring to those who have managerial positions or work in administration where in most cases a tertiary/higher education certificate might be required for that specific job.

promotion so he will be going to a better school than the one he is attending at the moment. But there is no day where we have gone to bed hungry so I am sure the salary is fine." (Interview: Palesa; 09/04/2014).

The point being raised by Palesa of not going to bed hungry is an interesting one that has been encompassed in the notion of happiness. The point shown there is that as long as a person goes to sleep full there is nothing else to worry about. People should be happy that they are alive and everything else comes after. By this she is using comparison to be happy in that she knows that there are people who have food problems whereby they go to bed hungry. Palesa's story can be related to the issue of benefits that was discussed above. As an upper grade worker of the company, Palesa is entitled to some benefits that the other workers have been deprived of as she confirms in her interview:

"the company gave me a scholarship to study with the condition that I do not leave the company and after that I get promoted… I cannot complain now because the company is doing a lot for me by giving me an education so I have that faith that in a few years' time after when I finish my education I will be better off so for me I have faith." (Interview: Palesa; 09/03/2014).

These sentiments were also shared by Tshepo, a Pricing Analyst and a Bachelor of Science (Statistics and Economics) graduate based at the Pick 'n' Pay Johannesburg Headquarters in South Kensington who said that he cannot complain because with the salary he is getting, he can afford a decent livelihood.

Content with the salary that one is getting is also determined by the conditions that led to the employment of that particular employee. This came out of the research as it was noted that one of the lower grade employees stated that although she is getting a low salary, she does not mind it. Zandile working at Pick 'n' Pay Yeoville said that she is re-writing her Matric

with the intention of enrolling for a Bachelor of Accounting at the University of Johannesburg; therefore she is just wiling her time. Hence she does not mind her little pay as she is targeting to leave the job by the end of the year and pursue her studies.

The case of Zandile brings out an interesting point which can be related to the situation in North America in terms of youth employment in the retail sector. In North America the retail sector employs a lot of young people who are either students or intend to be students hence they are not concerned with the poor working conditions within the sector because they do not expect to stay in those jobs for a long time and Usalcas (2005) uses Canada to illustrate this point. She notes that the largest employer of young people (below the age of 21) is the retail and food services and the number of the youths being employed in that sector has been increasing drastically. 82% of the total number of people between the ages of 15 and 19 employed in the retail and food sectors in Canada at that time were full-time or part-time students according to Usalcas (2005). "Generally, turnover is high in these occupations, since many leave for other, better paying opportunities" (Usalcas, 2005:7) and also because they are "constantly looking for other jobs that suits well with their schedules." The students in North America use these jobs to broaden their income while they are in school as they are faced with expenses like accommodation and upkeep. However this is not the case in South Africa whereby the retail sector job is the main job for most of the people working there including the young people. But the case of Zandile leaves me to raise the question that are South African students starting to follow the North American trend of getting jobs in the sector whilst they are studying. Could this be the beginning of South African retail industry serving as a bridge between careers for the country's youth? Zandile and Patrick stated that they have dreams of getting tertiary education and achieving bigger things other than staying with the company.

> *"I want to study Accounting at the University of Johannesburg. I have always wanted to do be an Accountant since high school…I am studying to upgrade my Matric marks so that I can do this and also get a bursary.* (Interview: Zandile; 23/03/2014).

It is very much possible for Zandile's dream to come true as she reported that she passed her matric in 2013 but needs to upgrade her marks so that she can be considered for tertiary and more importantly scholarships. However I argue that the South African retail sector is far from following the North American trade mark of offering the youth piece jobs because the unemployment rate in the country is so high to such an extent that these jobs are the actual jobs for most people.

Against the Backdrop of Low Remuneration in the Retail Sector

In the preceding section of this chapter I have discussed the issue of the low wages in the retail sector which the workers agreed that they cannot cater for their needs. With the central aim of this thesis being the survival strategies used by retail sector workers to endure life against these wages; it is of paramount importance to first understand the reasons why people are driven into this low paying work in the retail industry. The reasons include lack of a higher education background that leads to lack of essential skills and this means that the workers have limited options in terms of the jobs they are able to get. The lack of options is also caused by the high unemployment rate of the country that has been pegged at 25.5% (StatsSA, 2014) thus the economy has not been able to offer people a lot of jobs therefore people have just been content with the low paying jobs that they are able to land as it will be shown here. Just as Sennet (1998) I show that people in low paying jobs are full of complaints inside them but they cannot do anything because of the lack of options.

Salary: The Most Significant Driver into the Retail Jobs

Work is of utmost importance for most people in the world. Salaries that people get from working are in most cases what drives people to jobs even those which are not paying much. Most of the people who took part in this study reported that they joined the company because they were in search of a secure livelihood. Some said that they did not have anything to do professional wise so when the opportunity to work in retail presented itself, they grabbed it with both hands.

> *"I have to work, how will be able to survive if I am not working…I have to look after my child.* (Interview: Palesa; 09/03/2014).

> "*Yes of course the salary is very important that's what keeps me going*." (Interview, 09/03/2014).

Out of the fifteen workers interviews, eight of them were not born and bred in Gauteng, but they came from other provinces like Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Free State and North West. They came from these faraway places so that they can earn a salary. The fact that people travel all the way to Johannesburg in search of work shows how important the return one gets from work is.

Patrick who came from rural Free State three years ago said:

> *"Where I am from opportunities are hard to get. After I had finished school I wanted a job and since I come from a rural place I needed to be in the city to find a job that would be able to take care for me and my family. So I left for Bloemfontein the closest big city from my home but things did not work out pretty well so I left for Johannesburg where I was called by aunt who works*

for Pick 'n' Pay and that is how I got to work for Pick 'n' Pay." (Interview: Patrick; 15/03/2014).

Ruby who also originates from Free State said:

> *"When I got married my husband got a job here and after sometime I then followed here…at first I was not working but sitting at home and doing nothing is not right so I looked for work…it also helps when two people are working in the house because it can be hard for one* (Interview: Ruby; 15/03/2014).

Zandi who came from the Eastern Cape in 2013 said:

> *"Like any other person, I came here to look for opportunities and a better life because where I am from there is nothing. So I came here straight after finishing my matric last year and that is when I got a job at Pick 'n 'Pay"* (Interview: Zandi 23/03/2014).

Ayanda also from the Eastern Cape said:

> *It is the land of opportunities, the city of gold so I came here to try out my luck since back in EC there is not much going on compare to here.* (Interview: Ayanda; 23/03/2014).

Daniel from Giyan, Limpopo said:

> *"I came here in search of a job"* (Interview: Daniel; 12/04/2014).

Responding to the question of why she sought employment in the retail sector, Mathaphelo said that she had to earn something in life and Pick 'n' Pay did that for her. She said:

> *"I am a single mother. Over the years I have been able to put my kids through school because I work. I supported all of them when they needed something when they were growing up."* (Interview: Mathapelo; 09/03/2014).

Explaining the motive behind her going to work, Ayanda actually said;

> "*It is very important because it is the one that enables me to live in today's world whereby if you don't have money you don't have anything. This is the reason why I joined Pick 'n' Pay in the first place"* (Interview: Ayanda; 23/03/2014).

This sentiment was shared across the sample with the interviewees confirming that the sole reason why they go to work is to earn a living. When asked how important working for Pick 'n' Pay is, Thabang stated that "…it is important because it is my source of income and at the moment. I do not really have a choice I must live on it." Because the world we live in today is based on monetary exchange (Bourdieu, 2005), we have come to the stage where people have become desperate for jobs, any job according to Kelly (2014). This came out of this research as it can be noted that in as much as most workers are not happy with their jobs or/and the salary they are getting from it, they do not have much of a choice but to just stick with the jobs because it is in a significant number of cases the sole source of a livelihood. The underlying idea here is that work for most of the employees is simply the means toward an end of earning a living.

However the idea that salaries are the fundamental driver to get people to work can also be challenged. This point follows up on the principle that there is an overgeneralization of why people work as noted by Morse & Weiss (1955). Morse & Weiss argues that "a job serves other functions than the one of earning a living" (p.191). It can be noted that there are other

push factors that lead people to work besides the remuneration. Kate who also works for Pick 'n' Pay Hyper at Steeledale provides information that supports the ethic of work here. She says that;

> *"Work is important for me because it provides for me. There is no way I am just going to sit at home. I need to go to work, in my culture people wake up early in the morning and go to work. That's how life should be."* (Interview: Kate; 17/03/2014).

Some scholars like Somaria (2014) can subscribe to this idea of work going beyond the salaries. He includes the issue of societal value on the subject of work. According to Morse & Weiss (1955:191) work gives people "a feeling of being tied into the larger society, of having something to do, of having a purpose in life. These other functions of work serves are evidently not seen as available in non-work activities." The value that people add to society is determined by the work they contribute.

Labour Market Histories

The labour market histories of the workers confirm that working in retail has actually provided them with a better option. Most of them have been working before the Pick 'n' Pay job but for some this has been their first job. Patrick, Zandile, Ayanda and Thabang are amongst the younger workers whose first job is the one which they have now in retail working for Pick 'n' Pay. Asked why they sort jobs in retail they responded:

> *"When I finished school I did not have anything to do… I wanted to do science but I could not get into college because I did not do well. As I said I left home for Bloemfontein to look a job, I did not get one there and came to Joburg…the Pick 'n' Pay job came out after I had looked for a long time so I just took it." (Interview: Patrick; 15/03/2014).*

I had just finished school; I had nothing else to do with my life...I was not able to continue with studying because I did not do well… I had applied for a lot of jobs but the Pick 'n' Pay one was the one that first came through it. (Interview: Ayanda; 23/03/2014)

This confirms that with the lack of skills (as the participants confirmed that they do not have any post-matric education), lack of experience and the high unemployment rate in the country, the youth lack options to choose from with regards to jobs. The retail sector however is providing them with an option even though its low paying and they do not like it. It can be seen from the above cases that the retail industry is serving as a first experience for young people as their first jobs. In some instances there are some older workers who have stayed in these jobs for a while now. Mathaphelo said:

"*I started working for Pick 'n' Pay in 1982 so this is my first job (laughs)"* (Interview: Mathaphelo; 09/03/2014).

Lerato said:

"I had never worked before when started working for Pick 'n' Pay. I started working there in 1991and I am still there." (Interview: Lerato; 09/03/2014).

The two cases of Lerato and Mathephelo present an interesting case of people who have stuck with their jobs for 23 and 32 years respectively but they are the same people who confirmed that they are not satisfied with their salaries. This confirms that there are workers in the retail sector who experience a situation of "job lock". According to Huysee-Gaytandjieva et al (2013:1):

"The desire to adapt to feelings of dissatisfaction is natural. Dissatisfied employees are likely to try to reduce their job dissatisfaction and work-

related stress by adjusting to their current job or by changing jobs [1–3]. However, some employees fail to adapt to job dissatisfaction. These employees stay dissatisfied even though some of them may exhibit adaptive behaviour. When employees are unable to adapt and remain in their unsatisfactory work situation in the long run, they can fall into job lock (become stuck in their job)."

Therefore Lerato and Mathephelo have demonstrated a situation of job lock but it is of utmost importance to dwell on the factors that push workers to remain job lock for such a long time. Huysee-Gaytandjieva et al (2013) notes that age can cause an employee to fall into job lock as they conclude that older workers are more likely to fall into this situation. Like in the two cases noted above as they are both older workers it can be said that they now lack the motive to move on and look for other better paying jobs. Marital status also has been identified as one of the factors for workers to remain job lock in that those who are married will remain in job lock especially if their spouse is also working and providing. This can be seen in the case of Lerato and Ruby who confirmed that their husbands are earning money which is better than them and that makes it easier for them to sustain their respective households (*this will be discussed further in Chapter V).* However it is noteworthy to point out that it is not only the older workers who experience job lock.

The younger workers as well are also prone to experience job lock as Huysee-Gaytandjieva et al (2013) notes that working for two or more years in a job that you are not satisfied with can be characterized as job lock regardless of age and there are a couple of young people who have worked for that duration and more within the retail industry. But in relation to this I would say that in the case of South Africa the high unemployment rate is contributing to job lock as people are running out of options; so those who are on jobs will try to keep their current ones. In relation to this Mzwandile said:

> *"I stay on this job because there is nothing I can do. I cannot find another one. It took me time to get this one so you see that it is not good."* (Interview: Thabang; 19/04/2014).

Thabang also demonstrates that it is not easy to find a job thus staying on the current one might be the better option even though it is not rewarding that much.

> *"I have applied for jobs somewhere but I am not getting any so I for now I will be here"* (Interview: Thabang; 19/04/2014).

There are workers who have worked elsewhere before their jobs at Pick 'n' Pay and these provide us with evidence of how retail work has served as a cushion for some who have had worse jobs. The following quotations provide the details of the previous jobs held by some of the workers as well as their reasons to leave the jobs and sort other ones in the retail sector.

> *"I worked in a lot of jobs before that. I worked for the City Council as a cleaner, and then I worked in restaurants as a customer server in Johannesburg CBD and in Hillbrow and that is when I then joined Pick 'n' Pay in 2006…I left the City Council because I was on the contract and I did not get another one when mine expired. The restaurants were just some of those small jobs they ended, one owner of the other one I worked for in Brakpan closed because the business there was low.* (Interview: Ruby; 15/03/2014).

> *"I was working for a cleaning company as a cleaner. I worked for them at shopping malls and a school. Before that I worked for a local woman at a local spaza shop in Thokoza. Yes that is what I did before joining Pick 'n' Pay.* (Interview: Mzwandile; 15/03/2014).

As it can be seen here, people left their jobs for the ones they have at Pick ‘n’ Pay now because they were searching for greener pastures as their jobs did not offer much. However the jobs in the retail sector have proved not to be as greener as they would have wanted them to be to such an extent that these workers are still not happy. But if you look at the jobs that the workers were doing before the ones they have now at Pick ‘n’ Pick i.e. cleaning jobs, spaza shop assistants, domestic workers, restaurant customer services etc., one can argue that the current job is not the best the world can offer but it is certainly better than the ones before.

Other factors that made people leave their previous jobs must be acknowledged. Nozipho a till operator with Pick ‘n’ Pay said that she left her previous job due to the working conditions and time shifts she felt uncomfortable with. She said that she was working for a filling station shop that opened 24 hours and adds that;

> *“the shop opened 24 hours so sometimes I was required to work the night shift which I was not comfortable with. So this other lady from the same area as me told me about the job openings at Pick ‘n’ Pay and that is how I then Pick ‘n’ Pay.”* (Interview: Nozipho; 21/03/2014).

Comparing her last job and the current one in retail, Nozipho notes that she does not work overnight at Pick ‘n’ Pay and the latest she leaves work premises is at least 8pm. This shows that workers in retail are driven into that sector not because they want to or the remuneration is better but there are also other push factors that contribute to that fate, i.e. there are worse jobs with worse conditions. One of the fundamental factors why these workers lack options was discussed earlier in this chapter (lack of a higher education). Other factors include employee relations as raised by one interviewee who confirmed that she was frustrated with the relations at her previous job which eventually led her to seek for a job at Pick ‘n’ Pay.

When commenting about working as a tailor for a dressmaking shop in downtown Johannesburg, she says that:

> *"that job was not paying much and the way the boss was treating her workers was not good. As a result of that I started applying for jobs here and there and that is when I got the one at Pick 'n' Pay… The owner of the business was always around pushing us. It was too personal; she did not know her limits when talking to people. Here the managers are not like that; they do have their down side but they know their limits when ordering instructions."* (Interview: Tsholo; 21/03/2014).

As a result of this I argue that retail sector work is done by people who have limited options in life in terms of work. Therefore it has been a savior to many people despite low salaries at the end of the day they settle for them because they are "better than nothing". However there are other circumstances that have led people to work in the retail sector like poor employment relations and even with retail not really carrying a good track record in that subject (Kenny, 2007; Myers & Chan, 2011; Greenhouse, 2008) it still offers workers with an escape route that is better. Therefore the underlying argument I am presenting is that, the workers are not happy with the wages they get in retail, they have the desire to get better pay or move to other better paying jobs but given the current circumstances of the country's economy, this is not easy to attain.

Working for a low wage in retail for these workers can be attributed to the lack of post matric education as their qualification is a matric and below, e.g., in the case of the older workers interviewed. The thirteen workers who work on the shopfloor confirmed that they did not study further after completing their high school.

The Low Wages Are Better Than Nothing

I have thus far identified that the workers in the retail industry are getting low salaries and that they lack other career options because of their lack of higher education as well as the current nature of the South African labour market which is not offering much. But a key issue that came out of this research is that the retail sector has actually proved to be a better option for them. The workers have thus turned to settle with what they are getting.

This research converged with one that was done by Webster (2011) in which the title was a quote from one participant of that study which stated that "the wages are low but they are better than nothing" (p. 160). That particular study follows up on Barcheisi (2011) who argues that wage labour has not fulfilled its pledge of social emancipation in South Africa. The central argument presented by Webster (2011) is that flexible accumulation is the one cause of the continued decline in real wages for employees in the country and beyond. Salaries have declined sharply as companies attempt to reduce the cost of labour.

A couple of interviewees joined Pick 'n' Pay from other jobs. These people used to work as cleaners (for some cleaning companies), as waitresses and waiters, as shopkeepers just to mention a few as shown earlier. Most of them reported that the reason why they left their previous jobs is that they were in search of greener pastures and Pick 'n' Pay actually provided them with one even though they admit that the pastures are not as green as they would have wanted them to be. There is an element of comparing what they are getting in their current jobs in retail to what they were getting in their previous jobs. One interviewee's statement converges with this idea as she said' "what I am getting now is better than my previous salary as a cleaner at the restaurant" as she was responding to a question about whether she is satisfied with her salary at Pick 'n' Pay but it is not enough though. Another

interviewee mentioned that the salary she is getting is better than sitting at home doing nothing and not earning at all.

The other sense that came out of one of the interviews is that of better wage security in the retail as compared to other informal incomes. This opinion came from one interviewee who said that she was working at a garment shop whereby the owner had a payment system which she did not understand. She says that she did not know her actual pay day as she could get her salary late on top of the salary being low. She acknowledged that the salary she is getting at the moment at Pick 'n' Pay is not that great but it is better in the sense that she knows when it is coming and has never been disappointed in terms of delay in her getting paid. With regards to this, it can be noted that the issue of security is important for workers. Workers want stability in terms of their pay structure and the way they are paid and the cruel reality here is that in as much as some jobs are demining and low paying (like retail work in this case), they are able to offer workers a little stability that may not be found in most informal work.

It can be noted here that the jobs in retail are therefore survivalist jobs. The notion of survivalist jobs comes from the work of Webster (2011) which entails that there are jobs that are offering salaries which are not much to such an extent that they cannot do anything more than survival. This is part of his decent work deficit logic.

"Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men." (ILO, 2014).

Relating it to this study it can be said that there is most certainly a decent work deficit in the South African retail industry given the low remuneration the workers are getting as well as

failure to extend benefits to employees. The issue thus becomes a pressing one because the ILO reported that the decent work deficit is at the root of poverty (ILO, 2004). The ILO adds that,

> "poverty due to low and irregular incomes is associated with deprivation in human well-being, i.e. shortages of all kinds preventing people to lead a meaningful, dignified life as a human being. It also leads to social deprivation in terms of vulnerability, exploitative working conditions and lack of self-respect" (p.8).

The failure of the South African labour market to offer decent work shows that the issue at hand here is a pressing issue that needs to be identified and dealt with before it becomes a catastrophe. However this research shows that despite the problem being bad, workers in the retail sector have other mechanisms of survival they turn to and this is something that Chapter V delves into.

Workers' Household Compositions

This study argues that workers in the retail sector are not getting enough to sustain their needs. Furthermore, the salaries which the workers are getting are not only meant to cater for them alone but also for their immediate families and other relatives. Out of the sample of 15, 13 confirmed that they are either breadwinners of their respective households or that they look after other people besides them thanks to the salary that they are getting.

Workers interviewed for this study stated that they have children which they look after and provide for. This means that the workers have to feed their children with the salary they are getting and in the case of those children going to school they have to pay for their school fees as well. This was a young sample and most of the workers who have children reported that

they have a single child with a couple of the older ones reporting that they have multiple children.

Most of the participants for this study confirmed that they are responsible for the upkeep and well-being of other people. The people being looked after include parents and siblings mostly. The trend was more noticeable in the participants who came from other provinces outside Gauteng. Tsholo said;

> *"I look after my mother. She is now old and no longer has the power to work so my sister and I this side sent money that side so that she can be able to sustain herself and my brother who she stays with."(*Interview: Tsholofelo; 21/03/2014).

Another participant in the study Patrick said that;

> ***"****I am looking after my parents in Free State as well as my young sister who is still in school. Although my father is working and earning an income back home it is still not much so I always feel obliged that I as the elder child and the only son to look after my family. I usually send money or groceries back home so that they are able to survive."* (Interview: Patrick; 15/03/2014).

The household structure of the poor working class has been viewed as pertinent in some studies. Smith & Wallenstein (1992) argue that households are income pooling units but this study confirms that with a high unemployment and other societal ills in South Africa, some retail sector workers are often the sole breadwinners of their households with the responsibility of financially taking care of their unemployed members of their households (Kenny, 2007). In this study I also found that some of the family members which the workers look after financially do not necessarily stay with them but live somewhere else even as far as some other provinces. Mathepelo lives with her three children and a grandchild. She says she

supports her son who is in high school currently and another son who is unemployed at the moment. However her daughter is working and she said that she contributes to the support of the household. Lerato said that she supports her two children who are both still in school but her husband is a major contributor to the household as he is also earning an income. Palesa stays with her six year old son and her unemployed mother and she supports both of them. Ruby has three children who are all in school; she supports them with the help of her husband who she stays with who is also earning an income. Mzwandile said he supports his infant son but fortunate enough his girlfriend is also working and helps while Tsholofelo supports her young brother. Those who have others in the household who are contributing to its support made me confirm that the family has become one of the world's poor's greatest source of support (Collins et al, 2009).

The issue that the workers are looking after other people became important for this study. This is because the workers are on a low salary as it has been already confirmed therefore the question of how they manage to survive given this extra responsibility became one of the vital themes of this research. This is a question that the next chapter deals with.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the backbone of the theme of survival strategies used by retail sector employees against the backdrop of low salaries. I have shown that the wages of workers in the retail industry are low and this is because of the poor quality of the jobs that are done in the sector that does not require much of a higher education qualification. I have also shown that these workers have limited options and they have to stick with this low paying job as it is their sole source of income which also looks after other people in their lives like siblings, children, parents etc. This is because with the high employment rate in South Africa, the economy is not offering a lot of job opportunities for the workers. With all

this identified, the ball is therefore set for the next chapter which discusses the survival strategies used given the problem acknowledged here. This is the central theme of this research report.

CHAPTER V

COPING STRATEGIES: "THERE IS NO WAY WE CAN ALL BE BROKE AT THE SAME TIME"

Introduction

I have thus far established that workers in the South African retail sector are in a crisis of sustaining their livelihood. The remuneration they are getting from their employers is too low to cover their expenses to such an extent that they struggle to live in a country which is currently going through a period of increasing inflation, a weakening currency and rising food prices. In the wake of this situation, workers have managed to survive despite these callous conditions, and they have been able to live-off that small salary. In this chapter, I will examine how the households of these workers have avoided total collapse by adopting numerous other coping strategies. These strategies range from making alterations in lifestyle, compromising transport and accommodation and making use of social networks. This chapter examines the various ranges of strategies adopted by the low waged retail sector workers in a bid to secure and defend their households' standard of living. When discussing this matter, the chapter is also going to illustrate the importance of these various measures taken by the low-remunerated workers. Also included is how variables like age, gender, marital status and children play a role in the strategies which are adopted. To kick-start the discussion, a brief description of the current socio-economic environment of South Africa with a closer look at Johannesburg will be described so as to launch the discussion of the survival strategies and put it into context.

The Socio-Economic Status of the City of Johannesburg

Johannesburg is the primary business city not only of South Africa, but of the African continent as a whole. When describing the city, the Centre for Development Enterprise (CDE) (2002) states that Johannesburg has been tantamount to driving capitalism. Johannesburg is going through a steady increase of population due to in-migration into the city (City of Johannesburg, 2009). As a result of this, resources of the city are under pressure thus there is an increase of informal settlements as housing has become a pressing matter. But the issue of housing has been a tricky one in that it has been identified that most people go into informal settlements not because of the pressure on proper houses but because they cannot afford decent housing because their incomes are low so they turn to the shacks for accommodation (Tissington, 2010). By contrast, this study found that the retail sector workers interviewed are not staying in the informal settlements but they have other ways to make accommodation affordable for themselves, something that will be discussed in this chapter. Transport is another area that I looked at which proved to be essential in the subject of sustenance of the livelihood of low paid workers. Being mobile in a City like Johannesburg is expensive given that some workers stay far from their workplaces. I show here that there are certain modes of transport that low waged workers can afford and there other ways that they are using transport that ensures them that they spend less on transport. I will also show that there are income saving techniques that have been adopted by a lot of workers but at the same time some have other income generating activities that they are involved in. I will also provide a discussion of how the idea of work has limited the workers' other pursuits. The use of social capital and social networks in an urban set up like Johannesburg is also key to the survival of a lot of workers as I will show in this chapter. I will then close on the chapter by showing how the Foucauldian analysis of the notion of biopolitics can be applied to this study. The city of Johannesburg is going through a period

of increased urbanization. This means that there is lack of a social support system and a subsistence economy (that exists in the rural areas) as these support systems have been proven to be critical for the survival of the rural poor. These circumstances have promoted the increase of absolute poverty in the urban environment (COJ, 2009). This point raises the notion of the use of social networks by the working class, which is also fundamental in understanding the analysis of this chapter.

Speaking in terms of income distribution in the city, COJ (2009:50) states that "inequality remains very high, both in terms of race and in terms of space. It should be noted that the incomes of people living in specific areas, such as Soweto, have not seen the growth rates evident in other parts of the city." This converges with the point which was raised by Rogerson (2005:2) that "whilst a large proportion of Johannesburg's population is poor, the city also has a substantial middle and upper-middle class competing in global financial and trade markets and adhering to international norms of urban consumption and culture."

With poverty ravaging the citizens of the economic hub of Africa, Rogerson (2005) asserts that the informal sector which has presented itself as an axis for survival and economic growth has helped the urban poor to endure life in the city: "Johannesburg's informal economy encompasses a broad range of activities from street trading, backyard manufacturing, informal transport and a host of informal service activities" (Rogerson, 2005:5). I have shown in Chapter II that the working class in the city with specific reference to the retail sector workers can be regarded as the poor or more specifically the "working poor". With regards to this they also need to have survival strategies but unlike what is suggested in the work of Rogerson, they do not have much time to participate in the informal sector economy as their work time-shifts requires them to spend most of their time at work. In relation to this I show in this chapter that the workers have other survival strategies which they have adopted in order to withstand their poverty.

Survival and Livelihood Strategies

In the remaining sections of this chapter I provide a discussion of how people working in the low paying retail sector pursue secure livelihoods. "Livelihoods are understood not only in terms of income earning but a much wider range of activities, such as gaining and retaining access to resources and opportunities, dealing with risk, negotiating social relationships within the household and managing social networks and institutions within communities and the city" (Beall & Kanji, 1999:1). The argument I present here corroborates the work of Beall & Kanji (1999), who asserts that human capabilities and agency are very important in the way low-income urban households manage to survive.

Income Generating Activities

There have been a lot of studies which have been done that tackle the issue of urban livelihoods. One of the studies crucial in this subject was done by Mukwedeya (2011, 2012) who found out that Zimbabweans living in Harare relied on remittances sent back home by their relatives abroad. They used this to survive in the wake of the infamous Zimbabwe crisis of 2008. However his study also found that there are other strategies used by the Zimbabwean urban dwellers to endure the crisis that included taking part in the informal economy, urban farming, and urban-rural linkages amongst other mechanisms. This research also confirmed the same trend though it was different from Mukwedeya's due to geographical setting as it would be shown and also in that this one was more concentrated on a particular group of people, i.e. retail workers who have other commitments at work whereas his was more focused on the general population. Studies on poverty and livelihood in Johannesburg have ignored other survival and income generating activities that could be used by the working poor by focusing on the use of state grants, remittances, access to credit, indebtedness and savings as measures to secure livelihood (De Wet et al, 2008). This study on the other hand

went on to provide details on the other activities that the working poor may be involved in as shown below.

Three participants in this study confirmed that they are involved in other income generating activities so as to substantiate the low income they get from their formal employment in the retail sector. Lerato confirmed that since she started working for Pick ‘n’ Pay (it is her first job) she has been struggling with life because her salary is too low therefore she felt the need to increase her income base. She said that she worked on a couple of ideas she thought would be able to add to her income whilst she keeps her work and saw that selling some items at work was the best idea. Lerato stated that her customer base is her colleagues at work who she sells stuff to (even though she did not get into detail on what “stuff” she was referring to). She confirmed to me that her time schedule keeps her busy at work most of the time so she is not able to extend her customer base beyond her workmates even though she would have loved to. She mentioned that she is able to sell before and after her hours of work and during breaks. However, Lerato admitted that the income she is getting from that activity is not much but it has been able to help her with buying some of the essentials that are needed in her household.

The same sentiment was shared by Palesa who works in the same branch as Lerato. She was however open to me that she sells small women’s accessories like bangles, necklaces, stockings, hand bags, ear rings and other ladies’ accessories. She says that she buys these accessories at a Chinese wholesale retailer at lower prices and resells them to her workmates at a higher price for a profit. Just like Lerato, Palesa says that she sells her merchandise on lunch and during tea breaks to her workmates. These two cases shows us that work can also provide networks that can link to other sources of income. Palesa also admitted that the

income she is getting from this activity is not very much but accounts for something and it has actually made a significant difference in her household.

The two stories above shows that some workers in the retail sector are desperate to increase their income by any means to such an extent they turn to selling stuff to their workmates. What is interesting about the practice of selling stuff in the workplace is that it is highly discouraged by companies according to Heathfield (2012). Heathfield a human resource professional specialist and analyst said that the selling of goods by employees to their fellow workers is a practice which can get the workers' attention off the work they are employed to do. She also notes that things like food are mostly discouraged in that they may put the workers' health at risk as there could be hygiene issues that the selling worker would have not taken into consideration. However in the two cases reported here it can be seen that the two workers have managed to withstand this convention against them selling and the general feeling I got from their interviews is that they have the full support of their workmates who keep buying from them.

Another income generating strategy which came out of this study was working other jobs on top of the Pick 'n' Pay one. Kate spoke about her other side job which is a very intriguing form of part-time domestic work. In describing her work she said that;

> *"I am a part time domestic worker for three bachelors. One stays in Alberton and the other two stay in Honeydew. We discuss a schedule that suits me and then I go to their houses mostly after two weeks or one week sometimes or sometimes when they call and they need me. So I clean their houses, do laundry and iron their clothes and they pay me"* (Interview: Kate; 17/04/2014).

The case of Kate shows how innovative the working poor can be in a bid to increase their income. When she realised that her salary does not cater for her needs, Kate who describes herself as "hardworking", secured informal contracts of cleaning as described above. Time becomes a cause for concern in the case of Kate in how she manages to do these chores whilst fully employed by Pick 'n Pay. However, she clarified this matter when she said that she attends to these duties;

> *"On Saturdays when I am not working, or sometimes weekdays depending on my shifts for that week. But I make sure that I always go because the money I get out of that is very important."* (Interview: Kate; 17/03/2014).

Given the Pick 'n' Pay time shifts, Kate confirmed that she spends most of her time working. This point converges with a trend which has been popular in the US where the working poor work several low paying jobs thus working huge numbers of hours in a bid to make up enough to live by (Oxfam, 2013). In 2013 Oxfam an international think tank which is concerned with the issues of poverty did a study on the American working poor in which "the survey found that America's working poor have a strong work ethic, put in long hours, and believe that hard work can pay off. At the same time, millions of Americans hold jobs that trap them in a cycle of working hard while still unable to get ahead, which leaves them with little hope for economic mobility" (Oxfam, 2013:1). So what is shown here is that just like the American working poor, the South Africans are becoming more and more desperate to secure a decent livelihood therefore they tend to sacrifice their leisure to broadening their incomes.

Even though Kate minds in that the jobs she does are all not "respectable" she basically has no choice. This is because she needs the money and has to get as much as she can so that she would be able to look after her young sister who is still in school and there are a lot of things

she cannot afford with her retail salary alone. Kate went on to compare the salary she is getting from her fulltime job to the one she is getting from the other side job. She says;

> *"the Pick 'n' Pay one is much more compared to the part-time one in terms of numbers, but in terms of the work I put in the part-time one is too much because I do not have to do much. The guys give me R200 a day so if I do all three houses twice a month I will get R1 200 and I don't even spend more than 5 hour at one place but at Pick 'n'Pay I work the whole day. So the calculation can tell you the whole story here"* (Interview: Kate; 17/03/2014).

The sentiments shared by Kate here show that the urban poor must be hard-working if they want to improve on their incomes, i.e. they have to go an extra mile in order to achieve this. Saunter, Hess & Frohlich (2014) state that there are a number of reasons why people are having multiple jobs. One of the reasons they articulate to play a major role in multiple jobholding are wages, something that very much converges with this study. They say that there is a high probability that people who seek additional jobs are the ones who are in jobs which are not paying well. Saunter, Hess & Frohlich (2014) were writing in the context of the US but the above mentioned case shows us that the same thing is now also applying to the South African context.

Part time work has been an income enhancement strategy for most lowly paid workers but a study by Ford, et al (1995) shows that in the United Kingdom part-time work is highly associated with tertiary education students. The study found out that 30% of that country's college and university students participate in part-time employment which averages 3 hour shifts and a maximum of 14 hours per week. The main reason why these students take part in this form of employment is because they want to avoid debt and sustain their lives in big cities which the universities and colleges are situated in. The point about the city can relate to

this study in that it also focused on the life struggles in the big cities and it can be argued here that people need to broaden their income when they are residing in the big cities. However this part-time work trend in the UK cannot relate to the South African context in that with very high unemployment rates part-time employment can be hard to come by due to the high demand of jobs.

The Limits of Work-Time Shifts on Other Pursuits

That being said it can be noted that, it is not easy for people in the retail sector to work on multiple jobs for the simple reason that the work time schedule does not leave them with the privilege to do so. The workers interviewed for this study reported that they work an average of 45-60 hours per week with schedules pegged from at least 7-10 am as starting time to at least 4-7pm as their finishing time, for about six days a week. Most workers confirmed that they spend most of their time at work with the majority reporting that they also work on weekends and public holidays. Working outside the standard work times, i.e. after normal business hours (after 5pm) and working during holidays and weekends can be classified as non-standard work schedules (Henly, et al, 2006). Non-standard work schedules seem to be common for workers in the retail sector according to Henly et al (2006) and this research confirmed the same. In addition to their tight schedule, one has to add the time these workers spend travelling to and from work as this is of great significance in how they participate in other income generating activities. The average time they spend travelling is 30 minutes every day. The workers who are employed at Steeledale Pick ‘n’ Pay reside in places like Soweto and other suburbs in the East Rand including Voslorus, Katlehong, Thembisa etc. In addition to the time they spend on the road travelling, some of them added that they have to walk a distance from their homes to the taxi rank where they can get their transport to get to work in the morning. On top of that they said that they have to walk from where they drop off to their workplace and the reverse will happen on their way back after work. The issue of

time proved to be an issue for most interviewees who said they are not participating in other extra income generating activities. Given what I have explained above it can be said that the workers lack time to partake in such activities that can generate extra income.

The feeling that I got from some of the interviews from this group of people was that by the time they end their work they will be tired of running up and down the shop floor and carrying goods around the store that are heavy in some instances. As a result this acts as a barrier for them to be indulging in other activities because all they would want is to rest when they clock off for the day. However I also noted that not only do the long working schedules cause workers not to engage in other income generating expenses but they can also result in a situation of work-family conflict.

Work-family conflict is a situation where an individual who have roles in both work and her/his family's participation in both roles results in an incompatible demands between the two (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict can be experienced in either end of the two roles, i.e. it is bi-directional in that one's work life can resonate to her/his family life causing trouble in the latter life and it can also occur vice-versa. The findings of this study however emphasised how the work-life put a strain on the family life and according to Hochschild (1997) this is the most common of the two to occur the reason being that there is too much expectation for the workers from the employers who expects someone else to be filling the family role at home.

Nomzamo who works as till operator at Pick 'n' Pay Yeoville said;

> "*I finish work so late. At that time all I am thinking about is to rush back home see and play with my child for a bit before he sleeps…At that time I will be so tired so I will want to rest and prepare for the next day…so you see that there is no time."*

The thoughts raised by Lerato on this issue are of importance in understanding how crucial is balancing work-family time for these workers and people in general. She had continuously mentioned that she has a very tight schedule throughout the interview. And when finally asked if this tight schedule enables her to participate in other income generating activities, she responded that;

> *"Honestly you cannot especially when you open and close the store. I leave early and come back late as I have said and by the time I get back I will be tired, the only thing on my mind is to sleep. I only check if my kids have bathed and ate and prepare for them to go to bed as it will be late for them to stay up. So I do not have much free time. I work Saturdays as well and on Sundays I go to church but when there is time I go to Jabulani[4] where my mother and sister stays but at the same I need to spend time with my husband and kids".* (Interview: Lerato; 09/03/2014).

This confirms that workers struggle with trying to fulfil their duties as parents at home as they work long hours performing tiresome duties on the shop floor. There are three types of work-family conflict as articulated by Greenhaus & Powell (2006). There is time-based conflict whereby time is required on both ends and therefore there is a competing nature of time; strain-based conflict whereby pressures in one role can result in an impairment of the other role; and lastly, there is behaviour-based role whereby characteristics of one role is seen overlapping with the other role. From the two cases highlighted above it can said that the workers are battling with the first two forms of work-family conflict as they work hard to such an extent that when they get home they will be tired (strain-based) and that by the time they get home they will not have enough time to attend to their children (time-based).

[4] A surbub in Soweto, which is a couple of Kilometers from the participant's home.

I asked Kate (who confirmed earlier that she is involved in another part-time work as she strives for survival) how she balances her work-time and family-time given that she is spending a lot of time working. She said;

> *"yes it is difficult because this can be too much work for me doing because sometimes most of my free time from Pick 'n' Pay will be used at the part-time duties, but there is nothing I can do about it. I have to raise money for things I want so I cannot just sit and complain."* (Interview: Kate; 17/03/2014).

Jacobs & Gerson (2001) state that balancing the time which one spends at work against that she/he spends at home should be considered with care in future research. They found that we are currently living in times whereby we have moved from the era where the male figure of the house was the only one involved in wage labour; the woman has also joined in especially with the rise the service sector. Hence the time that people spend together as a family has declined as a result of the female figure being lured into the world of work as well like the retail sector. Since there is generally a lack of adjustment from working men to assist with family care this is detrimental to the households of most workers considering the fact it has been identified that family intimacy is fundamental for humans (Plek, 1977). However capitalism has taken this away from the workers and it turns to work out in the favour of the capital class. I argue that the retail sector workers spend most of their time at work contributing to the capitalists' accumulation of wealth whereas they are deprived of their life beyond work.

Even though there are some who have managed to squeeze in other activities in their tight schedule, it can be noted that the income generating activities they are engaging in are designed in such a way that they remain at the bottom of the social strata. This is because the incomes they are getting from their combined jobs are not enough to elevate them on the social class ladder due to the fact that both jobs are of low value jobs. The only activity that is on these workers' minds is to keep working hence even those who have other income generating incomes are involved in activities that revolve around working.

However the issue of time depends on people. In as much as workers spend most of their time at work and would like to use their free time with families as shown above, it is also worth noting that some individuals use their time for other activities like attending religious services as shown in a couple of interviews. Some go to school like in the case of Palesa who said;

> *"after work I have to attend UNISA[5] tutorials and work on my assignments and other school work stuff. Sometimes I have to work from the library as working from home is very difficult for me because of the noise, my mother's talking and my neighbours who always visit. I am forced to go to the library on Saturdays the whole days and on Sundays I go to church."* (Interview: Palesa; 09/03/2014).

Saving Techniques: Let Us Just Live Off The Little That We Have

> "Most of the urban working poor are part of the informal economy, occupying low-paid, low productivity and low security jobs. This is often an expression of weak or inappropriate governance as well as the result of market forces. Harsh competition for income-earning opportunities has

[5] University of South Africa – used by a lot of people for open distance learning.

> created a ‘race to the bottom’ with increased pressure on wages, working conditions and working rights” (Kuiper & van der Ree, 2006).

Thus being noted it can be said that wage labour is the only or most famous way to earn a living in a city like Johannesburg as compared to other African, Asian and Latin American cities. Cross boarder trading and remittances have become popular in survival strategies used by the Zimbabwean urban poor including those who are also in the formal economic sector (Mukwedeya, 2009, 2011, 2012). This strategy have also been applied by the poor people in other countries closer to South Africa like Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique who have tended to seek other opportunities beyond their boarders when the times get tough (Crush, et al, 2005).

With most interviewees confirming that they are not participating in any other income generating activities yet they claim that they are getting very low incomes which are not enough to cater for their needs; they were then faced with the question that how are they able to sustain their livelihood. What came out of the interviews was a general sense of acceptance from the workers whereby they have acknowledged their situation and they are thus trying to live off it. However to live off such a small salary requires a certain type of strategy and with regards to this most interviewees admitted that they have adopted income saving techniques whereby they have to compromise their livelihoods.

In relation to saving so that their incomes can sustain them and their families, Lerato and Mathepelo gave the response in which they both noted that they minimise their credits in a bid to sustain themselves with the low wages they are currently getting (a full section on debt can be seen later on in this chapter). These two together with other interviewees confirmed that discipline is essential when it comes to spending their salaries. Thaps mentioned that simple things like making sure that all electrical appliances that are not in use at that

particular moment are switched off is a measure that she has found out that it can save her a couple of Rands she spends on power as she admitted that electricity takes up a significant portion of her budget. Writing on the how the introduction of prepaid electricity changed the lives of people, Baptista (2013, 21-22) says, "prepaid metres allowed electricity users to develop a sense of control and 'discipline and autonomy'…discipline and the control over electricity consumption were made easy by the divisibility of electricity credit purchases."

Lerato made it clear that she does not spend on unnecessary things and makes sure that her essentials take number one priority when she is spending her income. She supported her point by saying that she has reduced her frequency of buying take-away meals and she said that she always make sure that she takes packed lunch to work as she has noticed that this is a cheaper option. Nozipho has the same strategy as the one mentioned by Lerato here but she also adds the dimension of compromising her looks in a bid to save the little salary she earns. She says that;

> *"Well I make sure that I take packed lunch to work and just microwave it if there is the need during my lunch break. The other thing is that if you work late hours you get free lunch which is helps at times but the late hours are not good in terms of safety when travelling back home…. I have recently cut my hair. I realised that weaves are too expensive and the long relaxed hair is also expensive to maintain. As you can see I have gone all natural. Hair products are expensive yet when I am like this I do not have to spend much, that's if I even spend (laughs).*(Interview: Nozipo: 21/03/2014).

Tshepo mentioned that he has to be meticulous in order to make sure that the salary he is getting can be enough to get all his needs. He stated that;

> *"I have to make sure that my spending is at minimum. When buying stuff first I make sure that I buy the stuff that I need first not that I want. Everything else follows. That guarantees me that I am well fed at all times, I do not go to work or to bed hungry. I make sure that I get cheap but nice clothes (I am well dressed at all times). With this I am able to live on a small salary and I will have some money left to send back home. I think with the right mind set people who are getting small salaries can be good. The problem that people face is that they want big things, live in accommodations that cost a lot of money and other things that are not necessary.* (Interview: Tsholo; 21/03/2014).

Patrick also shared the same sentiments in his interview. He says that;

> *I buy my clothes on store sales and promotions…I do not buy take-away from those fancy expensive restaurants as it will drain my pocket so I usually go with packed lunch or get the discounted food items. I only buy take away when it is necessary. With this I make sure that I have enough left in the pocket to take of other things necessary in life.* (Interview: Patrick; 15/03/2014).

What the interviewees have shown are other strategies that they use so that they will be able to live-off their low wages. However this is in the context of Johannesburg and I have to admit here that even in countries in the metropolis workers have to turn to other means to make sure that they survive their low wages. In the US Wal-Mart which has an average annual profit of US$17 billion which would make it the 26th largest economy in the world had it been a country pays its employees very low wages (Lewarne, 2013). This company pays its workers low salaries to such an extent that workers of the retailer in the state of Ohio

had to help their fellows who could not afford to buy food for and celebrate Thanksgiving which is a very popular holiday in the country. Some workers of the retail giant had to donate money to their lower paid colleagues so they would be able to purchase food on this big national holiday in 2013 (Lewarne, 2013). The essence of this point is to elaborate that this issue of retail sector workers being paid low wages to such an extent that they look to other ways for survival is not unique to South Africa but it can also be found in some of the bigger nations of the world.

Accommodation/Living Arrangements

In any other urban city in the world, be it in the third world or in the metropolis it can be noted that the issue of housing and accommodation is at the center of the struggle of the citizens, not only for the poor but for everyone. Dwyer (1976) did a research in which he found out that many urban areas around the world have become permanent settling destinations for most people within and beyond a country. This trend still continues even today. Due to this he notes that most countries including the UK have battled to address the problem of where this growing urban population will be habiting in the cities and he even says that in most third world countries the problem is yet to be attended to. However in South Africa the national government and provincial governments have attempted to address the problem of housing but their strides are still lagging behind as this issue is still persistent (Huchzermeyer, 2001).

This study concurs to some extent with the argument presented by Dwyer (1975) who says that most of those in the working class in the urban cities whom are faced with two problems. They either cannot afford to stay in the suburban areas or they are unlikely to be able to afford bus fare from proper residential areas to work. As a result of this they turn to what he calls spontaneous settlements. The Urban Geography Dictionary defined a spontaneous settlement as, “a squatter settlement or shanty town containing self-built houses made of

scrap materials such as corrugated iron and plastic; the settlement usually lacks piped water, an electricity supply and sewage disposal facilities." This form of housing has been popular among the working poor in and around Johannesburg (Crankshaw, 1997). In this study I show other accommodation alternatives that have been used by retail sector workers in urban Johannesburg. Though spontaneous settlements may be used on several occasions most retail sector workers have other arrangements that I show below and it is worth noting that I am not refuting Dweyer's observations.

A lot of the young workers who took part in this study came from other places outside Johannesburg and the main aim they left their homes was to take up employment in the "big city." This meant that accommodation was going to become a big issue when these people moved into the city given that their subsequent salaries were not going to be too much. Part of this group of interviewees confirmed that in as much as accommodation was a sticky factor when they left their homes, life in Johannesburg was made easier by their friends and relatives who were already residing there. They mentioned that because of the presence of people they already know in Joburg, it enabled them to make living arrangements that would work in their favour in terms of saving the little wage they are paid.

The description of the living arrangements of Patrick since he moved from the Free-State to Joburg gives us the perspective of how low paid retail sector workers manage to shelter themselves in the city. He says;

> "*I am currently staying with a friend in a two roomed backyard in Alex. We have a sitting room that also serves as the kitchen and then a bedroom where we both sleep… he is someone I know from back in the days in Free State…when I came to Joburg I was staying at my aunt's here in Alex as well*

> *but I decided to move out as her place was crowded with me living there as well as her children and other relatives… I could have gotten my own place but with my salary is too low as I have said earlier own so I had to do something and get a place that is cheaper and which I could share with someone and meet halfway for the rent"* (Interview: Patrick; 15/03/2014).

These sentiments were also shared by Zandile and Ayanda who works for Pick 'n' Pay in Yeoville. Both of them are from the Eastern Cape and they stay together with their other cousin who works for a security company in Johannesburg as well. In illustrating her living arrangement, Zandile said, *"On my own I would not afford rent. I could afford it otherwise but I am sure that after paying rent I will not be left with much to spend on other things so I think that this was a very good thing to do."* Ayanda added on to this by saying, "the three of us share the responsibility of paying the rent and other things like electricity and buying groceries and other household essentials."

The point that comes out of these responses shown above and others not shown here is that the retail sector workers do not have enough wages that enables them to get their own accommodation. Therefore they have to make compromises in the way they live by making living arrangements that they can be able to afford. This does not apply for workers who come from outside Joburg, but those who were born and bred in Joburg but working in the retail sector also confirmed that they cannot afford proper accommodation of their own. Most of the people who belong to this group confirmed that they are still staying in their parents' houses.

Mzwandile said;

> *"I stay at my parents' house in Thokoza with my mother, my older sister and my young brother… We all work so the burden is not left in the hands of one person."* (Interview: Mzwandile; 15/03/2014).

With regards to this Noziphi said;

> *"I am currently staying with my father and brother's family at my father's house (Katlehong)… Since we all work, we all expected to contribute things for the function of the household. It's not left in the hands of one person…I would have wanted to go stay somewhere because I am older now but the finance does not allow me to do so"* (Interview: Nozipho; 21/03/2014).

The same strategy of saving their money as they cannot afford rent also applies for this group of respondents. Studies have shown that traditionally people of this age group (who have reached the age of the mid-twenties) move out of their parents' houses as they start working and earning money and get into marriage as well (Buck & Scott, 1993). Palesa is in her mid-twenties and she has a son who is five years but she still stays at her mother's home in Soweto. She said that she is working on getting a place of her own but is comfortable with the current arrangement in that her mother needs her and she needs her mother as she can help with taking care of her son whilst she is studying. It can be noted here that Palesa is in a living arrangement of convenience where she is providing for her mother by looking after her and financially taking care of her whilst the mother looks after her son when she is working and studying. It can be noted that some workers are even getting to their thirties without moving out of their parents' homes. This can be seen in the case of Mzwandile who stays at his parents' house in Thokoza with his mother, elder sister and a young brother. He is in his early thirties and has been working for a while now and he still stays where he grew up despite the fact that he has a child with his girlfriend who also happens to be still staying at her mother's house as well. The other young people also said that they are either staying with

their parents or with other siblings and this has proved to be convenient for them as in most of the cases they report that they help and get assistance from people in those households. They do this in that they are all responsible for the upkeep of the household something these workers would have struggled to do had they been staying alone. It can however be noted in the cases above that not only do these living arrangements provide shelter for the workers, but belonging into a household with other income earners can also provide stability i.e. converging with Wallernstein & Smith's (1992) point that households are income pooling units.

The underlying point I am bringing out here is that even though retail sector workers have reached and some passed the age whereby they should be settled and having their own places to stay as shown in this study, their current wage does not allow them to do so, therefore they have to turn to other forms of living arrangements as shown above.

However it is worth noting that those workers who are older seem not to struggle when it comes to living arrangements and this can be attributed to their marital status. Three older women were interviewed one in her fifties and the other two in their fifties. I was privileged enough to interview Mathepelo (in her fifties) and Lerato (in her forties) at their homes. Lerato stays with her husband and children in a big house in Soweto and she said that the house was purchased by her spouse who is an entrepreneur and is currently busy renovating the house. Mathapelo also has a decent house which she says that it was purchased by her late husband. Ruby who works for the Pick 'n' Pay branch in Steeledale stays in Germiston with her husband and children in a three roomed house that was bought by her partner. The point that comes out of these three situations is that women married to men who have better paying jobs are at an advantage of living a better life as their partners will be in a better position to uplift their wives who are getting wages that very low to sustain life in the urban areas. It can be said here that other members of the households that low paid retail workers belong to can

act as a source of stability for these workers (Kenny, 2001). My argument here is not that women need men to be elevated in life, what I am saying here is that marriage puts someone in a better position to sustain life because of the help one can get from the spouse if the spouse is working or earning an income.

One point that shows that living arrangements for the workers are determined by the salary they are getting can be supported by the case of Tshepo the pricing analyst. Tshepo as a high grade worker is getting a salary that is way better compared to the one that the other interviewees are getting, and he is staying in a two-bedroomed house in Bedfordview where he is staying alone. So I conclude here that income is very essential when it comes to where and how one stays in an urban set-up like Johannesburg. This can be seen in the case of the retail sector workers who are not able to afford their own rent to such an extent they have to settle for other living arrangements.

Transport/Travelling Arrangements

Travelling to work has proved to be a big problem for most people who stay in the urban areas. Transport costs take up a large portion of many people's incomes in the urban metropolis. With the workers getting very low wages for their work, one of the tasks of this research was to understand how they tackle the issue of transport and some interesting responses came out with regards to this.

Fourteen out of the fifteen workers interviewed confirmed that they do not own a car as they could not afford it. However the issue here really is not about owning a car or not because with their low salaries one would assume that it is a given that these workers do not own cars. Just like how the workers compromise their living arrangements, this research was concerned with finding out if there are strategies used by the workers as well in terms of commuting to

and from work and moving around as transport expenses give the working class a nightmare. This question was influenced by the trends that I have seen in Johannesburg that there are modes of transport that are used by the poor and the working class and the most common that comes into mind on this subject is the train. In South Africa the train has become a symbol of poverty and struggle and one cannot help but notice that in prose texts (novels) and in popular culture (soapies, drama series and movies) the train resembles a certain class of the South African population that is the labourers. There are other cheaper buses that the working class use as they cannot afford to buy cars or in this technological age where there are other expensive modes of transport like the Gautrain which is viewed as the "rich man's train".

This study however showed that contrary to the popular belief that the working poor use the *stimela*[6], the taxi[7] is the more preferred mode of transport by the retail sector workers. The taxis might not be the cheapest mode of transport around given that the *stimela* is considerably cheaper, but it is the most convenient mode around. The study by the Dept of Transport (2003) noted that people in the urban and metropolitan areas of the country have turned to the taxis because the taxi ranks and routes are closer to their homes than any other mode of transport. This was also shown to be true by this study as Palesa who resides in Soweto and works in Steeledale stated;

> *"I use the taxi because the Taxi Rank is closer to my house"*. (Interview: Palesa; 09/03/2014).

Tsholo who also works at Steeledale mall but lives in Soweto also agreed to that point as she said,

[6] The popular Nguni translation of train often used to denote the working class' train
[7] The omnibus in the South African context

> *"I actually do not have a choice because taxis are the only ones that are always available because the train station is far. So there is no other way. I cannot afford to buy a car*". (Interview: Tsholofelo; 21/03/2014).

In as much as the majority of the sample uses the taxi, I show here that this is not a strategy to save up salary but it is a matter of convenience and a lack of choice.

Not only does the issue of convenience apply to the use of taxis but the areas that some of these people live suggests that they stayed in close proximity with their work so that they won't spend a lot of money on transport travelling to work. Five of the interviewees who work at the Yeoville Pick 'n' Pay reported that they stay in surrounding areas where they do not need to catch a taxi or a bus to get to work, but they just walk to and from work. All of them reported that they are happy with this in that they do not have to spend much on transport as this can be too much.

However a few of the interviewees showed that there are saving strategies that they have adopted in line with transport spending. Nozipho who stays in Voslorus and works in Steeledale where she is supposed to use two taxis to get to work said she has a strategy of cutting the amount she spends on transport. She explains;

> *"I leave home with my brother in the morning and he drops me off in Germiston on his way to work and I will then proceed to work by taxi. When coming back I use two taxis to get home in the evening… it plays a big role in saving because the money I save by travelling with him can amount to up to more than R100. It is not that much but it can make a difference on my spending."* (Interview: Nozipho;21/03/2014).

This case is not unique to Nozipho alone as Ruby also shows the same strategy as well as she alternates between using public transport and leaving with her husband in the morning when both their schedules allows them to. Her husband works in Wadeville which closer to where she works and by using him for transport sometimes it can be regarded as a strategy to survive on her small salary.

In a nutshell it can be said that though a few workers in the retail sector apply their low wage survival methods when it comes to transport, most do not have the privilege to do so. In most cases convenience applies when it comes to the subject of what is used to travel to and from work.

Social Capital and Social Networks As a Survival Strategy

Social capital and social networks appear to be playing a fundamental role in the survival battle of retail sector workers in South Africa as shown by this research. The importance of social capital and social networks has been covered in a lot of academic dialogue and one of the proponents of these notions is the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Social capital was defined in the work of Bourdieu (1977:503) as "a capital of social relationships which will provide if necessary useful support". He clarifies that the support he was referring to is not just limited to tangible and economic forms but resonates to all other aspects of human interaction. This was also covered in his later works where he points out that, relationships between individuals are not solely based on monetary or material gain as articulated by mainstream economists (Bourdieu, 2005) but these relationships opens up opportunities and they keep individuals socially competent as well competent on the market as they provide information necessary to participate on the market. Coleman (1990) read the work of Bourdieu with care and brought out a new dimension that the French author had not brought into perspective. Coleman finds out that when Bourdieu talks about social capital benefits his

argument is limited to the powerful people in society but he further argues that social capital is also beneficial to the poor and the marginalized people and this helped shape this study. With regards to this he defined social capital as "the set of resources that are inherent in family relations and in community social organisations" (p.300). The underlying argument here is that social capital is an asset of the disadvantaged. Collins et al (2009) have also shown that families and communities have proved to the world's poor's greatest source of financial support.

Social networks have been identified as a fundamental element of social capital. Zierssch & Athurson (2005) offers the simplest definition of social networks when they say that these are the social links that exist between individuals. This study was not interested in the general networks but it was more specifically concerned with the networks of the poor living in urban areas. The research was influenced by Narayan & Woodcock (2003:242) who say that "social networks of the poor are the primary resources they have for managing risk and vulnerability" and this enables them to form mutual relations that are essential for sustaining a livelihood.

Most of the participants for this study demonstrated a level of reliance on their relationships with people they are close to be it their parents, siblings, cousins or friends as Mosoetsa (2011) has also found. As it can be seen in the preceding segments of this chapter and the one before this that the interviewees have capitalize on the relationships with the people around them. Palesa for instance mentioned that her mother looks after her son whilst she is studying and working and in return she is also looking after her. Lerato also verified the same thing as she said;

> *"There is an aunt of mine who stays here just around the corner who agreed to look after the kids during the day. She also has an older child who does not work so I leave them with the responsibility of my kids."*

In terms of what she gives her aunt in return, she said that;

> *No they are just doing me a favour and will also do them favours here and there like help them with something they want but I do not necessarily pay them. We are just helping each other.* (Interview: Palesa; 09/03/2014).

Ayanda said that she left her daughter with her mother back in the Eastern Cape. I asked Thomas who has an infant son and his wife also goes to work how he manages to look after his child during work hours and his response was;

> *"My sister-in-law looks after him when we are at work. She came here specifically for that and helps with the household chores as well. But we are planning to take my child to crèche next year; we wanted him to start this year but we had financial troubles."* (Thomas: Interview; 19/04/2014).

What these three interviewees' responses have in common is that they all take use of the people around them to look after their children during their busy work schedule. The norm in the urban areas these days is that people take their little children to crèches or nursery homes. The other common service that can be used with regards to this is hiring a professional nanny that looks after the children. But the sense coming out from these three is that they cannot afford the above mentioned services because they are getting low wages working in retail. The give-and-take nature of social networks is also evident in the above examples.

The notion of social relationships playing a fundamental role as a survival strategy used by retail sector workers continued to pop out throughout the interviews with the participants.

The participants were asked where they go in times of financial need. The theme of social networks accompanied most of their responses. In relation to this Ayanda said;

> "*I am fortunate enough to be staying with my two cousins and together we make life easier for each other. If there is time that I want travel and do not have the money, I just borrow from one of them and will give them back when things have settled. I am going to try the Employee Loan, but I have heard with other people that it is hard to get and the procedure of getting it is very complicated."*(Interview: Ayanda; 23/03/2014).

The quotation above from Ayanda shows that she has pinned a lot of faith in her social networks to aid her in a time of need to such an extent that she does not pin the same level of faith to structures like the "Employee Loan" that have been established to help people in a needy situation. This is similar to the point I raise in the next section of this chapter that some people are now afraid of being in debt hence they try to avoid getting credit. As a result of this they prefer to turn to their social capital. Nozipho also echoed the same sentiments in her interview as she said that in time of financial need she;

> *"I turn to my father and brother. There is no way we can all be broke at the same time. And in any case those two are the men of the house so they have to play their role to make sure that I am well provided for"*
> (Interview: Nozipho; 21/03/2014).

Social security networks have been identified as some of the most common social networks in South Africa and in most urban high-density areas, they are informal. "Informal social security organisations such as savings clubs (also known as stokvels) burial societies,

religious associations and community support groups are examples of some of the social networks that play a vital role for the poor and displaced urban people of South Africa" (Mukorombindo & Coetzee, 2013). Stokvels are basically saving schemes that consist of a number of members in which each member is required to contribute a fixed amount of money on a monthly basis (in most cases though some differ) and one member of the club receives the full amount that was collected for that period of time. These structures have been playing an integral part in the livelihood of the urban black community since they began in the 20th century and they have proved to be a trusted source of credit among the black working class as they have preferred it over banks and other registered credit providers (Verhoef, 2001). The same functional aspect is used in burial societies but the difference in this case is that the fund is used to help the members in case of death in her/his family.

Only one of the interviewees (Mathaphelo) confirmed to be part of a burial society. She said;

> "*there is a burial society I am involved in Tladi with the other ladies. We help each other in the cases of death, we assist with funeral arrangements and we have subscriptions that will cater for finances in unfortunate circumstances like these. We also get together and discuss other social issues."(*Interview: Mathaphelo; 03/09/2014*)*

Mathapelo who is in her fifties said the burial society has helped her on a certain occasion though we did not delve much into the issue. In relation to stokvels, again only one interviewee confirmed to be part of one, Ruby said;

> *"I am part of Women's club by which we pay monthly subscriptions and we take turns to individually collect that money once a month. This money has helped me a lot in buying household furniture."* (Interview: Ruby; 15/03/2014).

It is worth noting that some authors like Bond (2013) and James (2013) have however shown the dark side of relying on credit institutions or other forms of credit (like stores banks or Mashonisas) especially on the part of the working poor. They show that institutions like these can leave the working poor in enormous debt which is detrimental to personal growth. Already as it stands there are a lot of South African households that are drowning in poverty because of debt. What this research has shown is the same thing Mukorombindo & Coetzee (2013) has shown that most households do not rely much on social security networks as it can be seen that only two out of the participants take part on those structures. The age dynamic that comes out of their study is also evident in this one. In their study they conclude that older people are far more involved in social security network structures like stokvels as compared to the young. The two cases above confirms the same for this study in that Mathepelo and Ruby, the two participants in their fifties and forties respectively take part in such activities whereas the bulk of the participants who are in their twenties and thirties do not.

However social security networks do have to be formalized in the form of stokvels. Some people have groups that are informal but still have the same principle as the formal ones. A similar point came from Lerato who said that she is not part of any stokvel as she does not have time to participate in such and she is generally not interested in them. Interestingly enough she said she is part of group friends and based on the description she gives with regards to her little social group one can conclude that they have an element of a social security network. She said;

> *"I do have a group of friends who I go out with. We have helped each other here and there like myself they helped me when my house flooded due to rain. They helped me with money as it was at the middle of the month which I used to buy a gas heater and other things. I was cash strapped but I had to repay them at month end. But we do not have something compulsory or formal."* (Interview: Lerato; 09/03/2014).

Even though social security networks are not popular with this group of workers, they do participate in other social groups that do not have a financial aspect to it. Two men Tshepo and Daniel said that they part of a group of friends whom they meet regularly but they said that there are no contributions or any money talk. These groups are just for socialization.

In as much as social capital and social networks form an important part in the survival strategies of not only the urban poor but the general poor in South Africa it is shown in this study that most of them that are utilized by retail workers are mostly informal like making use of the people around them as shown earlier. I differ from the point that social security networks' contributions have limited membership in that the urban poor cannot afford to pay the subscriptions (Mukorombindo & Coetzee, 2013). I argue this point does not apply to retail sector workers as they can afford these subscriptions. The reasons why they are not part of such structures is that they are generally not interested, they do not have time to participate in them, and mostly they are focused on their wage labour.

Using Social Capital and Social Network in Addressing the "Debt Problem"

The level of consumer indebtedness in South Africa is enormous and it has been a cause for concern in the country since the early 2000s, that is even before the global credit crunch and it is the salaried black (African) workers who have been identified as having this borrowing problem (James, 2012). The figures shown by du Plessis (2007) used by James (2012) to illustrate the high levels of personal debt in South Africa are alarming. They show that personal debt has grown from R350 billion in 2002 to R1.1 trillion. According to James low income earning citizens get into debt not because of their purchase of luxury goods, but for long-term investment purposes. But it is worth noting that the workers referred to in James' article are middle class where for this study I was focusing on the poor working class. Therefore I argue that the working class is confronted with the desire to attain long-term investments but for them they lack the capital to acquire credit. Take the case of Mzwandile who said:

> *"...I also want to marry my girlfriend who I have been going out with for a couple of years now. I cannot do that because I cannot raise money for lobola with the money I am getting here. She is still staying at her parents' house with our child and I think we should be stay as a family the three of us. But we are not yet married. The child is growing up."* (Interview: Mzwandile; 15/03/2014).

Men who do not have the money for lobola can pay a startup but they will be indebted to their in-laws until they finish the full amount they were initially charged. James (2012) stated that marriage debts are one of the common elements of the indebtedness which has plunged the Africans in South Africa. The case of Mzwandile above shows however that there are African men who have been careful enough not to be drawn into marriage debt which they

cannot afford to have at the moment given their low wages. I agree that there is a debt problem in the country but I argue that some of the working poor have been careful not to drown themselves in debt. Other than the case of Mzwandile above, two participants (Lerato and Mathapelo) confirmed that they try as much as they can to avoid buying things on credit. Lerato said,

> *"you see the problem with borrowing is that the giving back is difficult…when you get paid you have to return and your pay is taken mostly by paying back so you will not have any money left for use for that month..yes I used to do that but it is just trouble."* (Interview: Lerato; 09/03/2014).

According to Bond (2013:584) paying back loans is a huge load as a "report indicate that 40 percent of the monthly income of SA workers is being directed to the repayment of debt" and this is what people like Lerato and Mathapelo are trying to avoid. On that note Bond (2013) notes that the majority of the debt of poor working class in South Africa lies in microfinance which has been increasing its popularity amongst this social class. One of the popular forms of microfinance institutions for the working class are the informal money lenders known as *Mashonisa.* The Mashonisas give loans to people who will return the money with interest on top of it. However the Mashonisas use drastic measures to recover their monies from borrowers. Some of them confiscate ATM cards with the aim of withdrawing money direct from the borrowers' bank accounts as soon as their salaries are transferred there (James, 2012).

The only interviewee who confirmed to be in serious debt was Thomas who said that he is paying off a set of furniture that he purchased on credit. Ayanda and Zandile said that they borrow from each other as well as their cousin who is also close to them but they said that

they restrict these loans to small amounts that will be needed for use at that immediate moment. It can be noted here that these transactions are socially embedded and they are informal (Collins, et al 2009). They are flexible in that the debts can be written off but the disadvantages in these transactions lies in their precarious nature, i.e. will the relative that you gave money return it (Collins, et al, 2009).

Biopolitics in Relation to Work and Survival Strategies

I have thus far noted that there are a number of strategies and techniques that are utilized by low paid retail workers in a bid to secure better livelihoods. But an interesting finding that came out of this research is that, the large conglomerates in the retail sector manage and maintain their exorbitant profits through a number of reasons and this can be found through the strategies the workers adopt or their time schedules that does not permit them to engage in other income generating activities. One of the reasons that are essential and key to this study is that they manage to keep their workers in line, i.e. disciplined in a way that is profitable to the company. Loonat (2012) shows that service workers employed in the hospitality industry in Gauteng have come to a stage whereby they consent to servitude. Her basic argument is that, workers consent to servitude "as they actively participate in their exploitation through conforming to the enterprises' interests….consenting to servitude is not only the acceptance of exploitation but also the creation of a submissive and subservient workforce" (p.69). She adds that, "this can be seen as the product of desperation for employment coupled with the goal of receiving a higher income" (Loonat, 2012). Loonat shows how this consent is manufactured. She says that in the hospitality industry there is the mechanism of tipping whereby waitrons receive gratuity by offering a service that is satisfactory which forces the workers to do a good job and impress, which works in the favour of the "ruling class"[8] as it increases its profits by aligning the interest of the worker to that of the business. Her

[8] Loonat uses this to refer to the owners of the restaurants

argument was a follow up from Burawoy (1979)'s text which examined the metamorphosis of power relations within factories. According to Burawoy (1979), exploitation in the factory is legitimized through processes that are designed to fabricate consent. According to Buroway, the capital class has assured discipline of the labour process through mechanisms of control and this aspect is being used in the retail sector as Chan (2011) shows how machinery, technology and surveillance is being used by Walmart in China.

However this study shows that discipline in the retail sector can be understood in relation to Michel Foucault's notion of biopower. Foucault used this term in explaining the numerous and diverse techniques used by modern nation states for achieving the subjugations of the human bodies and the control of populations, i.e. managing people as a group or having power over bodies (Foucault, 1976). Foucault's theorization of power was targeted at showing how the population is controlled via disciplining the body (McHoul & Grace 2002; Faubion, 1994) but in this study I show how this Foucauldian notion can also be applied to the work and livelihood of modern day low paid workers. Companies manage to control discipline over their workers because of the power they possess. Foucault's research showed that power's existence in societies has changed from sovereign mode to a non-sovereign one (Foucault, 1995). The former strategy was used mainly by monarchs in the feudal times whereby there were a lot of repressive forces that were used and the most prominent was capital punishment whereby public torture and execution would take place. This form of punishment was solely focused on the body, that is to say the sovereign's main target was to hurt, cause harm or deform the body. Surveillance was the technique used to control people in the latter with the aim of making sure that they adopt a certain behavior and this was achieved by placing an individual in a sphere of visibility and this is where the concept of the panopticon was used by the theorist. Thus for Foucault punishment has changed from control of the body to control of the mind which is also used to keep workers disciplined nowadays. I

argue that not only do these techniques of power apply in nation states' governance but they also seem to appear in contemporary workplaces as they are used to safeguard profit by capitalists and also ensure discipline on the part of the workers.

The mind of the worker nowadays is designed in such a way that makes her think about work most of the time, a point that scholars like Weeks (2011) discuss and try to advocate for a metamorphosis of such thought. It can be noted that most workers interviewed for this study are not involved in other work but they are solely focused on the job they are doing in the retail sector at the moment. This conversion in the way power functions can be found in Foucault's thesis of biopower. Biopower is the new form of power that is now used to foster life and development meaning unlike the execution and killing involved in yesteryear, power is now used to secure life (Foucault, 2004). The point being raised by Foucault here is that there are now productive elements in power. One can argue that the productive element is concerned with safeguarding or developing the interests of the capital class represented by the retail business in this study. According to Foucault (2007), biopower has two poles i.e. disciplinary power and biopolitics. The one that is relevant for this study is biopolitics in which the power has moved from controlling the individual to that of controlling the multitude (the population) or the group of workers in the case of this study. Normalisation become a central element in maintaining discipline and in this technique workers' minds are designed to follow a set of procedures that are regarded as normal like going to work and not looking for other jobs but settle for what is there. The main aim of the new techniques of power is to secure domination and here it can be noted that the labouring class has continued to be dominated by the capital class by avoiding taking part in other income generating activities. It can be argued that the retail sector workers are working long hours thus preventing them from doing other things like income generating activities for their survival. Thus it can be said that time is a technique that have assured the employers to take control

over the workers and make sure that there are solely focused on doing the work they are employed to do. For Foucault (1990) the aim of the use of the techniques of power is to attain normalization. Normalization is however two-fold, i.e. it involves the construction of an idealized norm of conduct (in the case of this study going to work and focusing only on that in terms of acquiring income). This normalization has ensured that workers not only in retail but across all other industry concentrate on doing their jobs hence they have found it difficult to be involved in other income generating activities and to move up their career ladder and get better jobs that are well paying. The second fold is that normalization ensures that individuals are rewarded or punished for conforming or deviating from this ideal accordingly.

Some of the workers interviewed for this study have managed to be disciplined to such an extent that in as much as they admitted that they are not getting a lot of money from the retail industry; they have managed to keep their jobs in the sector for close to two decades or even more in one case (refer to the job-lock section in Chapter IV)

Conclusion

This chapter unpacked the different strategies that are used by retail sector workers to survive the urban life against the backdrop of the low wages they are getting. The interviewees confirmed that accommodation in the city of Johannesburg is expensive to such an extent that they cannot afford hence they have to adopt other measures like living with other people as they struggle to afford rentals. It was shown in this chapter that some of the living/accommodation arrangements have also overlapped with the issue of transport costs as it can be seen that some workers stay a walking distance from work or closer to the taxi ranks. Social networks and social capital has become a central strategy for the urban working poor to sustain life under low wage. Relatives and friends have been of utmost importance in the survival of the retail sector workers and it can be seen that most of the relationships that

the workers have are of give and take nature. The reliance on these social networks can be seen in the quotation by Ayanda who said, “there is no way we can all be broke at the same time” referring to how she can count on her two cousins she stays with in times of need. The low paid retail sector workers have also been adopting other income generating activities but this has not be applicable to most workers and to those workers who have been engaged in activities like these, the extra income has not been enough to elevate them from their position in society. I have argued that long working hours have prevented the workers from partaking in other income generating activities. One of the explanation why some of the workers remain trapped in the low paying retail jobs as well as why they are not involved in other activities can be found in the work of Foucault that explains bio-power and bio-politics.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to understand the livelihood of low paid retail sector workers who work and reside in Johannesburg. It also intended to explore the survival strategies that are pursued by this group of low remunerated personnel. It is worth noting here that the actions of the retail sector workers are not solely an outcome of their employment in the industry but it is a product of broader occupational and class dynamics. Drawing on recent literature on households and livelihood the study aimed at contributing to our understanding of these two topics by showing the impact work has on these themes. In relation to this the study adopted the Land-Labour-Livelihood (LLL[9]) as a framework that would aid in bridging the gap between labour studies and urban livelihoods studies. The underlying idea that guided the study was that issues of labour has long been segregating the livelihood aspect hence this study deemed that a holistic approach which encompasses these two subjects will help further understanding the experiences of low waged labourers in high demanding urban settings. This study confirmed that retail workers reproduction remains to be based on the wage hence there is a need for academics to expand this discourse by including a lot of the workers' life aspects.

However it is of significant importance to note that the findings of this study are not representative of the experiences of the retail industry's entire population. What this study has attempted to do is to offer an indicative of the nature of the sector's employees in Johannesburg based on a small sample that was selected purposively.

[9] It is worth noting that the first L of this approach i.e. Land has been absent throughout this study prompting further research that will cover on it.

The findings of the study indicate that life can be tough for low waged retail sector workers in a big city like Johannesburg. Not only does low remuneration affect their broader livelihood, but also with labour market flexibility taking its toll in a globalised world, their salary packages often lack non-wage benefits as well. The cruel reality that came out of this study is that in as much as the retail sector has not provided its employees with better salary packages, it has however provided them with something that they can rely on in the meantime as found in Webster's epic quotation: "the wages are low but they are better than nothing." The reason why we are in a cruel situation like this is that the unemployment rate in South Africa has been soaring in recent years to such an extent that the chances of one landing a job are becoming slimmer in this environment. As a result of this it took time for people in the retail sector who partook in this study to get into their current jobs. Therefore it can be argued that this industry which does not have a positive track record when it comes to providing employees with decent work (as advocated by the ILO) has presented itself as a saviour to tens of thousands who are employed in that sector. In addition to the unemployment rate the lack of post-high school education on the part of these workers means that they do not have a lot of job options available for them. The labour market histories of the workers in the retail sector also prove this point as it can be seen that most of them have held even more demeaning jobs compared to the ones they have now.

This cruel reality means that the workers in the retail sector have to live-off their low wages which brings us to one of the main aims of the study i.e. to find out how these employees manage to survive with such low remuneration. The research established that not only does the employees' pay fail to secure long-term investment; they also fail to meet basic needs such as rentals, utility bills and other things like clothing. This has caused a nightmare for these lowly paid professionals who are strides away from affording life in the city of Johannesburg. These retail sector workers who belong to the lowest social strata of the

society are in addition expected to cater for other people (like their children, siblings, parents, etc.) as well on their salaries.

As a result of this some of the workers have started to indulge in other income generating activities like selling goods in a bid to broaden their household income. However in as much as this activity has been familiar in other studies particularly in neighbouring Zimbabwe (Mukwedeya, 2012) this research found out that the majority of the workers are yet to take up such activities and it is mainly attributed to the issue of time as most of it is spent at waged employment. The issue of lack of spare time for the workers can be directly linked to Foucault's theorisation of biopolitics whereby this study noted that the retail sector companies are controlling their workers to such an extent that their only concern is performing their waged work duties, i.e. keeping them away from being involved in other income generating activities.

However this study found out that with the lack of income generating activities, workers in the retail sector turn to strategies of saving. It was found in this study that the workers try as much as they can to keep their spending at a minimum level so that they will be able to live-off their low salaries. Techniques of saving included discipline when it comes to spending which has proved to be essential in keeping households of the workers up and running. This has also prompted many of the workers to avoid credit and it is a measure that is fundamental to the South African context whereby it has been reported that household debt in the country has been escalating of late (James, 2012; Bond 2013). However measures like these have meant that some of the long-term investments like marriages have been halted. A significant portion of that low wage is being saved by a lot of the workers by making living arrangements that are affordable to them. Most of the workers especially the younger ones reported that they stay with other people like relatives and in some instances friends in the

city (whereby they share the rental outflow) in order for them to cut down the rental expenses.

Social capital and social networks have proved to be pivotal in keeping the low waged retail workers buoyant this study found out. It was seen that the kinship networks have been used by the urban poor when it comes to provision of services like child care. The advantage of these networks is that there is no obligation that there should be cash transactions but in most cases these are done in a form of a give-and-take basis something that can relax the tension in the workers' pockets. Social networks have in some instances been used by workers to avoid debt.

This study attempted to show the importance of other income generating activities which low waged employees take up as these have been deemed important in elevating the working-poor across the world from a position of misery. But as mentioned above what this research found on the ground is that such activities are not very popular with the South African retail sector workers who have other techniques of survival. In relation to this I argue that in the few cases where such activities are used, they prove to be essential in broadening the income of the workers and this converges with studies that have been carried outside South Africa.

This study did not provide a practical alternative of bettering the livelihood or wage packages of workers in the retail industry, but it has attempted to provide evidence-led information about the situation on the ground with the hope that this will open further dialogue on the issues of in-work poverty. This can lead to scholars, academics, and other social stakeholders concerned to step in and come up with concrete plans.

It then raises the question of how can the working poor be encouraged to be innovative and take up entrepreneurship ideas that can broaden their incomes since fighting for better wages is proving to be unfeasible under capitalism. However this prompts another question that how

then would the working poor engage in the income generating activities given what this research has shown, that there is not enough time for the employees to take up these activities adequately. In relation to this I suggest that there should be more studies that should be done within this field that will try to make a breakthrough on the way forward.

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Appendix I: Participant Information Sheet

Good day.

My name is Zivai S Mukorombindo and I am student registered for a Masters of Arts (Sociology) by Coursework and Research Report at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting a research study to inquire into the job and livelihoods adaptation methods used by retail sector workers in the wake of flexible labour arrangements. It is hoped that this information may enhance the understanding of other mechanisms that workers use to adapt to their ever changing work.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary and there is no reward for participating or penalty for not participating. Involvement in the study requires your participation in an interview for approximately one hour which will be scheduled at a time and place that is suitable for you. You will not be obliged to answer any questions with which you are uncomfortable and therefore have the option to decline or to respond to any questions asked. You will also have the option of terminating your participation at any stage that you choose.

With your permission the interview will be tape recorded. All data collected through the interview will be treated within the strictest confidentiality.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on email 386843@students.wits.ac.za or mobile 071 310 8932 or alternatively you can get hold of my supervisor Prof Bridget Kenny on 011 717 4445 or email bridget.kenny@wits.ac.za. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study an abstract will be made available.

Thank you for taking time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely

Zivai S Mukorombindo.

Appendix II: Participant Consent Form

I hereby consent to participate in the research that Zivai S Mukorombindo is undertaking.

- I understand what participation in this research means,
- I understand that my participation is voluntary,
- I understand that I have the right not to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable with,
- I have the right to withdraw my participation in the research, at any time I so choose and
- I understand that any information I share will be held in strictest confidence by the researcher

Signed by …… ……..on…….....at……

Signature…….

Appendix III: Interview Schedule

other questions will come up during the course of the interview for the sack of probing

1. How old are you?
2. Are you originally from Johannesburg?
3. May you please take me through your education background?
4. May you please tell me about your employment history before working for this store (Pick 'n' Pay Rosebank Shopping Mall)?
5. Before joining PnP did you have any other alternatives in terms of jobs?
6. How long have you been working for Pick 'n' Pay?
7. Have you worked for any PnP branch besides this one?

   If yes, how the changes in workplace did affected your daily life (e.g. travelling, social relationships?).

   If yes, can you describe how you adapted to your new job?
8. Do you perform more than one duty in the store (or in your previous branch)?

   If yes, can you please describe what the transition is like for you (from performing one duty to another)?
9. Is your salary enough to cater for your needs?
10. Besides yourself do you have other people you look after?
11. Is there anyone who helps to take care of expenses in your house and what do they do?
12. Do you have any other sources of income besides your salary?

    If yes, can you please briefly explain these and why?

13. Can you please explain your time shifts at work?

    Do you have enough spare time to engage in other activities (social, economic etc.)?

14. How has been the response been from the people around you (spouse, family, friends) with regards to your job (patterns).

15. Have you encountered any problems at the workplace with regards to changing jobs/duties or store branches.

    If yes can you explain this and how have been your support system (family, friends, spouse) assisting you in facing these challenges?

16. Ever since you started here, have you received any other job offers?

    If yes, can you please explain how that panned out.

17. Do you have anything you would like to add with regards to this issue?

Probe areas - any income saving strategies (clubs joined/ stokvels, accommodation/who the person stays with, mode of transport to work).