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'Tales of the Women of Warwick' : the narrated lives of informal street traders.

Coats, Tamryn

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Abstract

This research project focused on the narrated lives of woman informal street traders. Ten women from the Warwick Junction market in Durban, South Africa, of varying ages, were interviewed. The women selected participated in two interviews, one narrative interview and a follow up in-depth open-ended interview based on their life narrative. Thematic analysis was conducted thereafter; through this process recurring themes relevant to all participants were identified and discussed. Five dominant themes resulted from the thematic analysis: 'Economic challenges'; 'Politics, police and permits'; 'Work'; 'Being a woman' and 'Support'. The findings of this research showed that economical challenges were a substantial issue for several of the women, many of who grew up in poverty and remain trapped in the poverty cycle. Disturbingly, several women highlighted how local authorities and corrupt police showed little regard towards trader's opinions and several women nostalgically recollected trading conditions before 1994. Many of the women were the sole breadwinners for their families, supporting children and grandchildren and great emphasis was placed on the importance of their work as a means of economic survival and financing their children's education, as schooling was understood to be leverage out of the poverty cycle. The supportive role of the women's communities was a significant feature in their lives. Several overarching social networks became resources in times of crises. The need to utilize the community as a supportive network was largely due to the lack of formal support women informal street traders received from local authorities. This research raises concerns over the City's perceptions of, and approach towards, informal street traders, specifically in the last decade.

Furthermore, this study highlights the need to broaden understandings of the means of coping used by women in contexts of poverty, constant vulnerability, and exposure to frequent psychologically disturbing trauma.