

Quetelet Seminar 2007: Poverty Dynamics  
and Vulnerability. Measures and  
Explanations in Demography and Social  
Sciences

**Social environment and inter/intra-generational relations**

**Mating, Fertility and Chronic Poverty in the English-Speaking Caribbean**

Dennis A.V. Brown, PhD

**Introduction**

In this paper an attempt is made to understand the nature of the relationship between mating and fertility and intergenerational poverty. The question it asks is to what extent does the institution of mating and fertility as practiced by Caribbean folk conduce to the reproduction of poverty across generations? Is the relationship between mating, family and intergenerational poverty causal or merely associational? Furthermore, how is the relationship best captured through research? The paper combines demographic measurement of age, sex, fertility and consumption status with in-depth interviews of the poor on the themes of poverty, family and life experiences in an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the underlying role of mating and family in the reproduction of poverty across the generations. In the paper a case is made for the importance of understanding poverty as a dynamic phenomenon that is distributed not only spatially, but also temporally. In this regard, poverty is best understood as a phenomenon in which some people are entrenched, some are able to escape and one into which some will fall.

**Data Sources**

The quantitative analysis is done using data from the Living Standard Measurement Surveys (LSMS) conducted in the OECS countries of the Eastern Caribbean and among the Dependent Territories of the U.K.. These surveys are done under the auspices of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), DIFID, CIDA and the EU. The LSMS consist of a household based survey of living conditions, a household budgetary survey and an Institutional Analysis (IA). The household based component of the survey collects data on household composition, migration, age, sex, fertility (women aged 15-49), ethnicity, consumption levels, education, health, labour force status and social welfare.

Another important component of the survey is a community based Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA), consisting of community mapping, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews of selected poor households. It is this latter data source that provides the basis for the qualitative analysis that informs the paper. The in-depth interviews extend over many hours and may take place on more than one occasion. It has three main sections. The first inquires into the interviewee's history and life story. The second

orients both the researcher and the interviewee to the specific topic of interest. The third draws these together in a reflexive dialogue about the meaning of the interviewee's experiences in light of his or her history. The interviews are open-ended, searching for the themes of meaning in participant's lives. They aim to understand the lived experiences of people. The main question that is asked is 'what has this person experienced?' 'How does this person understand his or her experiences? Qualitative analysis also allows for a deeper appreciation of poverty's social context and its relationship to individual level intangibles such as feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness and low self esteem that contribute to the reproduction of poverty across the generations.

### **The Research Question**

The central research question addressed by the paper is are there ways in which chronic poverty in Caribbean society finds continuity, (or discontinuity) at the level of the individual through the mediation of mating, gender and family structure?

For purposes of this paper, it is hypothesized that the effects of socioeconomic deprivation with its origins in the society's macro-structural arrangements are filtered by the prism of gender and are associated with a mating pattern that conduces to large family size and unstable family relations, both of which in turn are associated with the reinforcement of poverty and its transmission across the generations.

### **Fertility and Poverty in Caribbean Society**

Fertility in the Caribbean has followed the historical trend of decline towards replacement and below replacement levels. This is in keeping with the hypothesis that the Caribbean is experiencing a demographic transition governed by the control of mortality in general and infant mortality in particular (Guengant, 1992). This argument suggests that over the period 1960-1980, against the background of mortality declines, contraceptive usage among women in sexual unions rose from 10% to between 50-70%, except in Belize where it was reported to be below 10% at that time. Of course the mere availability of contraception will not lead to its usage by the populace. Indeed the conventional argument is that it is only when faced with the prospect of self improvement that women will utilize these devices and procedures on a systematic basis.<sup>1</sup> Guengant suggests that in the Caribbean the failure of agriculture coupled with non-industrialization, over urbanization and massive emigration led to the emergence of a mind set that shifted from the view that a large family was a good thing. This process he suggests was aided by the spread of primary schooling.

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<sup>1</sup> If the experiences of the British are anything to go by, it is instructive that certain structural changes in this society and its economy were associated with the emergence of fertility control practices even in the absence of the sophisticated birth control technology so readily available in the modern era. See C. Wilson(1984);Wrigley, E.A (2004).

Poverty, it seems, has mediated this trend. There are pockets of poor women in the population that depart from this pattern. The poverty that reduces the capabilities of these women to cope with their social and economic circumstances is indelibly associated with their fertility behaviour. These women are usually educated to Primary school level only, lack employable skills and face bleak economic prospects. The question arises, what is the nature of the relationship between their high fertility and their status as chronically poor persons? Is it a product, or is it a cause, of their poverty. Or, is the relationship merely co-incidental?

### **Chronic Poverty, Mating and Family in the Caribbean**

The historical political economy of the Caribbean has endowed the region with a legacy of social neglect and material deprivation.<sup>2</sup> This manifests itself at the individual level through the institutionalization of economic, psychological, social and cultural factors that have created certain 'habitual' responses to deprivation.<sup>3</sup> One expression of this is found in the area of mating and family formation. In the Caribbean a complex pattern of mating and union formation exists. This has its genesis in the region's African cultural antecedents and its historical experiences in the era of Plantation slavery. The outcome among significant proportions of the population of African descent has been a system of union formation in which formal marriage often represents the culmination form of the mating system and takes place late in life. More often than not, it represents the embellishment of an existing union between a man and a woman rather than its initiation.

In Caribbean societies with a predominantly African ancestral heritage the majority of mothers are involved in a socially, but not formally sanctioned relationship with a man at any given point in time.<sup>4</sup> Some of the households counted as being single mother female headed, in fact represent families spread between two households with the male members living in a separate households. This type of relationship is known as a 'visiting' union. Not all visiting relationships lead to cohabitation. A woman might, in the course of her childbearing years, enter into a number of visiting unions any one of which *might* lead to cohabitation and eventually formal marriage. A man, on the other hand, may be involved in more than one visiting relationship simultaneously, or may be involved in a formal

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<sup>2</sup> This is a central theme of the Plantation Society thesis promulgated by thinkers of the New World Group. Prominent among these theorists were Lloyd Best, George Beckford and Norman Girvan. The underlying notion that informs their work is that the Caribbean economy was created to satisfy the needs of foreign interests rather than local needs as is usually the case with economies. A historical pattern was established which saw the periodic inflow of large amounts of foreign owned and controlled capital into delimited areas of the local economy. Once the 'project' for which it came ran its course the capital exited leaving behind underdeveloped social infrastructure and people except in those limited areas in which it had been employed to make profits for its owners. See, L. Best and K. Levit, *Outlines of a Model of Pure Plantation Economy*, *Social and Economic Studies*, XVII (March-December), 283-324, 1968. See also G. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: underdevelopment in plantation economies of the Third World*. Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See D. A. Brown, *The Weight of History: Some Recent Evidence of Chronic Poverty in Grenada*: Paper presented at School of Continuing Studies Country Conference, *Beyond the Boundaries*, St. Georges, Grenada 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Socioeconomic status mediates this mating practice since it has its greatest preponderance among socio-economically disadvantaged persons, the majority of whom are of African ancestral heritage.

marriage or common law relationship even whilst being involved in the visiting relationship [Brown, 2002].

TABLE 1. Union Status by Quintile: Persons 15+

		Per Capita Consumption Quintiles					Total
		Poorest	II	III	IV	Richest	
		Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	
Present Union Status	Legally married	13.3	20.2	21.4	27.3	35.0	27818
	Common Law union	20.9	20.1	17.8	15.4	11.6	19337
	Visiting partner	14.1	11.9	16.1	13.5	15.2	16448
	Married but not in union	0.1	0	1.1	0.8	1.7	943
	Legally separated and not in a union	2.1	2.8	3.8	3.1	1.4	3024
	Widowed and not in union	2.6	2.7	3.0	3.6	5.4	4103
	Divorced and not in union	0.2	0	0.2	0	2.1	644
	Not in a union	46.1	42.3	36.5	36.2	27.7	42697
	Don't know/Not stated	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		19906	21390	22812	23965	26943	115015

Source: St Lucia Country Poverty Assessment 2005.

Table 1 shows the distribution of union type by socioeconomic status for the Caribbean territory of St. Lucia 2005. The table is a static, point in time, representation of the dynamic system of serial mating described above. The chi square statistic for the table was 0.000. The table shows an inverse relationship between formal marriage and socioeconomic status, that is, the proportion of the respective socioeconomic groupings involved in formal marriage increases with movement up the socioeconomic gradient (Poorest to Richest). Thus a mere 13 per cent of the persons in the poorest quintile are formally married as opposed to slightly more than one third of those in the top socioeconomic grouping. The disproportionate share of this union type by the groupings at the bottom and top of the socioeconomic hierarchy can be seen as expressions of the interaction of class and cultural traditions.

The converse of the relationship between socioeconomic status and formal or legal marriage obtains in regard to socioeconomic status and common law unions (that is, persons cohabiting without first entering into legal marriage). The incidence of this union type decreases as we move up the socioeconomic gradient. The visiting union's incidence is fairly even across the socioeconomic gradient, but it can be conjectured that this union type has a different fertility function at the bottom and top of the socioeconomic gradient. Among the poorest in the society this union type usually represents the form within which sexual relations between a man and a woman are initiated. As such, among this group first births usually occur in this union type. At the other end of the gradient where formal marriage is the dominant union type, the visiting union is usually entered into either as a brief precursor to formal marriage, or as a result of a breakdown in formal marriage. Among this grouping, this union type is, generally, not one in which procreation takes place.

The poor do not value formal marriage any less than the wealthy, but their circumstances do not allow for its ready adoption as a mating form [Patterson 1982]. What they do in lieu of this constraint is reflected in the proportionate share of the 'not in a union' category enjoyed by the lower socioeconomic groupings. The elevated size of this grouping among the poor gives expression to the mating and union formation pattern described above. A goodly proportion of the women in this grouping would be single mothers living with children fathered by more than one man, but who were not at the time of the survey cohabiting with a man. It is a group they move into and out of (via visiting and common law unions) as circumstances dictate.

This state of affairs poses interesting demographic questions regarding the relationship between socioeconomic status and fertility. One proximate determinant of fertility is exposure to the risk of pregnancy. Therefore if women in the poorest quintile are disproportionately represented in those union types that experience lower levels of exposure to the risk of pregnancy as Table 1 tells us, how is it possible that they could have higher levels of fertility than women in the wealthier quintiles who have greater proportionate representation in cohabitive union types as the paper contends? There are a number of possible answers. The first has to do with another proximate determinant of fertility, contraceptive usage. Disempowerment, lack of opportunity, fatalism, ignorance and ideology are some of the factors that suggest themselves as possible bases for differential use of contraception. These factors suggest and anecdotal data confirm that women in the lower socioeconomic groupings tend to have an aversion to these devices.

Another answer to the conundrum is that women in the lower socioeconomic groupings tend to have higher levels of cohort fertility since they begin childbearing at an earlier age. Their fertility behaviour would therefore be characterized by a longer period of childbearing due to the earlier start and shorter spacing of births due to lower levels of usage of contraceptive devices. Therefore, notwithstanding the reductions in the exposure to the risk of pregnancy that women involved in serial monogamous mating would experience, these conjugal forms are associated with relatively high levels of fertility among poor women [Marino, 1970; Roberts 1955].

Table 2 shows age at first birth by socioeconomic status as measured by quintiles, derived from LSMS consumption data for a number of Caribbean territories.

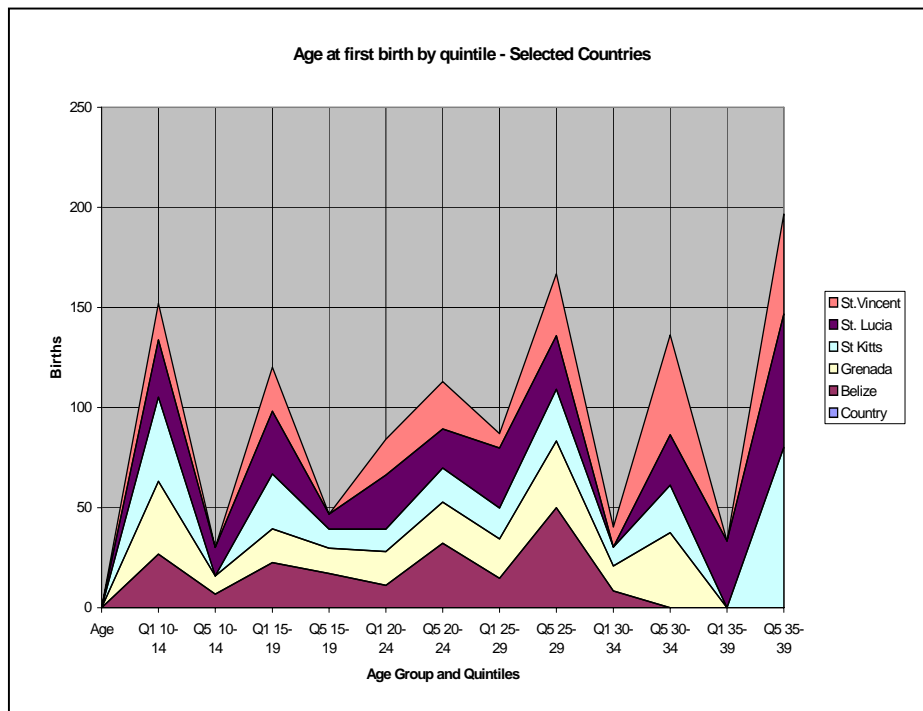
**Table : 2. Age at first birth by Quintile**

Age and Quintile	Belize	Grenada	St. Kitts and Nevis	St. Lucia	St. Vincent and the Grenadines
<b>10-14</b>					
<b>I</b>	26.7	36.4	42.1	28.6	18.2
<b>II</b>	20.0	18.2	31.6	42.9	36.4
<b>III</b>	33.3	9.1	10.5	14.3	27.3
<b>IV</b>	13.3	27.3	15.8	-	18.2
<b>V</b>	6.7	9.1	-	14.3	-
<b>Total</b>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>15-19</b>					
<b>I</b>	22.5	16.9	27.4	31.3	22.1
<b>II</b>	20.4	25.5	19.8	24.4	19.5
<b>III</b>	20.7	22.9	24.4	21.9	26.1
<b>IV</b>	19.4	22.1	18.8	14.9	19.9
<b>V</b>	17.0	12.6	9.6	7.5	-
<b>Total</b>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>20-24</b>					
<b>I</b>	11.2	16.9	11.1	27.1	17.9
<b>II</b>	16.3	16.2	28.1	17.8	22.6
<b>III</b>	18.4	18.4	23.0	13.1	10.4
<b>IV</b>	21.9	27.9	20.7	22.4	25.5
<b>V</b>	32.1	20.6	17.0	19.6	23.6
<b>Total</b>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>25-29</b>					
<b>I</b>	14.7	19.6	15.5	30.0	7.1
<b>II</b>	14.7	13.7	13.8	13.3	21.4
<b>III</b>	2.9	11.8	24.1	13.3	19.0
<b>IV</b>	17.6	21.6	20.7	16.7	21.4
<b>V</b>	50.0	33.3	25.9	26.7	31.0
<b>Total</b>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>30-34</b>					
<b>I</b>	8.3	12.5	9.5	-	10.0
<b>II</b>	41.7	-	9.5	41.7	10.0
<b>III</b>	8.3	25.0	19.0	25.0	20.0
<b>IV</b>	-	25.0	38.1	8.3	10.0
<b>V</b>	-	37.5	23.8	25.0	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>35-39</b>					
<b>I</b>	-	-	-	33.3	-
<b>II</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>III</b>	100	-	-	-	-
<b>IV</b>	-	-	20.0	-	50.0
<b>V</b>	-	-	80.0	66.7	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<i>100</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: SLC Country Poverty Assessment data, St. Lucia 1995, Belize 1996, St. Kitts Nevis 2001, St. Vincent and the Grenadines...

Table 2 shows that there is a clear relationship between age at first birth and socioeconomic status. There are some anomalies, but the overall trend is that the percentage share of poor women in the first births experienced by the respective age groups into which the childbearing years are divided declines with age. During the teen years women in the first two quintiles tend to have the majority share of first births. As age increases the majority of first births occur to women in the top two consumption quintiles (wealthiest). The pattern whereby age cohort fertility peaks in the teen years is characteristic of Lesser-Developed countries of the world. The age cohort fertility that characterizes the Developed countries sees fertility peaking in the age groups beyond 20 years. The existence of a lag in the fertility transition in some Caribbean territories is brought out by the fact that in these countries the two patterns are to be found in the same population. Figure 1 graphs the relationship between age at first birth, age and consumption quintile.

Figure 1 Age at first birth by quintile- selected countries



In the age groups less than 20 the peaks (highest share of first births) occur over Quintile 1 and the troughs (lowest share of first births) occur over Quintile 5. In the second half of the graph the reverse obtains.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and fertility is also evidenced from an examination of live births ever had by quintile, for St. Lucian females aged 15-49. Table 3 shows this relationship.

**Table 3 Live Births Ever Had by Quintile, St. Lucia Females 15-49 (2005)**

		Per Capita Consumption Quintiles					Total Count
		Poorest	II	III	IV	Richest	
		Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	
No. Of	0	36.1	41.3	40.0	41.1	44.2	17508
Live	1	15.7	13.7	19.4	19.8	18.9	7596
Births	2	10.6	12.8	16.6	20.2	21.8	7085
	3	7.5	12.8	9.4	8.4	8.3	4028
	4	8.5	7.4	6.2	3.6	4.7	2589
	5	9.2	3.5	4.5	3.7	2.8	1999
	6	5.0	4.1	0.8	1.6	0	952
	7	1.03	1.4	2.9	0	0	466
	8	3.0	2.2	0.4	0.4	0	487
	9	0.5	0.4	0	0	0	77
	10	1.6	0.5	0	1.3	0	285
	11	0.5	0	0	0	0	41
	14	0.5	0	0	0	0	38
	Total	7573	8607	9217	9548	8205	43151

Source: St. Lucia Country Poverty Assessment, 2005

Live births ever had by women aged 15-49 tells of the fertility behaviour of women born between 1956 and 1990. While it will not tell of changes in the overall rate of fertility, this data allows for an understanding of the extent to which fertility differentials associated with socioeconomic status might have either changed or remained the same over this period of time. The table indicates that fertility differentials between poor and non-poor women have persisted over the 34 years that the ages of the women represent. In other words, poor young women display the same propensity to have more children than their more well off counterparts as did those who are now at the end of their natural childbearing period did 30-35 years ago. The question as to whether the differentials will be the same when those who are now just beginning childbearing reach age 49 cannot be answered by this data, but the pattern of the poor experiencing relatively higher levels of fertility than the non-poor is quite evident.

One outcome of the union formation, mating and fertility practices described above is the phenomenon of families with 'missing men', or families of women and infants with no men present in the household. As the analysis thus far has suggested, this tends to have its greatest manifestation among women and children with the lowest socioeconomic status and, arguably, reinforces their poverty across generations. Demographic treatments of this phenomenon that highlight union type and or fertility behaviour both have women as their main focus and tend towards an interpretation of women as victims[Roberts...

Roberts and Sinclair 1978, Roberts and Braithwaite 1960] Other commentators on this matter have painted a picture of the woman not so much as victim, but rather as a negotiator using her offspring as leverage to gain access to the man's income. The extent of her powers as negotiator it is suggested is less a function of human agency than changing power relations between the genders fostered by structural changes in the wider macro economy [Handwerker, 1989].<sup>5</sup> Similarly, among the poor, women, rather than men, have been deemed to be the one's responsible for delaying marriage. This, as a means of safeguarding the material resources she has managed to accumulate from possible misuse by the man [Lefranc, et al 1998].

It is the strong association between serial mating outside of formal marriage, 'missing' men, multiple births and poverty that begs the question as to the nature of the relationship between these variables in Caribbean society. The arguments thus far would seem to suggest that men and women following the dictates of culture, gender and biology are responding to a harsh historical legacy and socioeconomic deprivations of the contemporary period. How is this related to the reproduction of this poverty across the generations?

### **Fertility Behaviour and the transmission of poverty cross the generations**

The poorest women in the society have the largest number of children and they do this by starting childbearing early and having multiple births. The fact that the majority of poor women mate outside of formal marriage and that their daughters, who are themselves poor, seem to reproduce the mating and fertility behaviour of their mothers begs the question as to the nature of the factors at work in the association between mating form and the transmission of poverty across the generations. In order to answer it, data gathered through in-depth interviews with selected households in the poorest communities in the country are analyzed.

In the conduct of the qualitative interviews in the survey the views of the community are sought in the identification of the poorest households. It is these households that are interviewed and seem to be characterized by a. intergenerational poverty b. a pattern of large family size (5+ children) fathered by more than one man, this pattern being intergenerational. The following case study is illustrative.

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<sup>5</sup> Handwerker posits a link between microlevel attitudinal factors and macro level changes in the concept of moral economy or the behaviour and beliefs associated with the obtaining of resources on the part of individuals. He does not however provide ethnographic evidence to support his hypothesis.

## Poverty and Fertility across the Generations

### Case Study 1. Rachael, Joyce and Janet (St. Lucia)

Not much is known about Rachael. She is the mother of Joyce and the grandmother of Janet. According to Joyce she is now in her sixties. Rachael did 'housework.' She had 10 children with five different men. She had her first child when she was, at most, 16 years old. At age 19 she had Joyce, her third child. Joyce's father in turn had 6 children with women other than with Rachael. He worked as a machine operator in an edible oil factory.

### Mating and Fertility

Joyce says she is 39 years of age, but is most likely 43. She describes herself as coming from 'a big poor family.' She attended Primary school. Her attendance was intermittent since as she puts it, "is not all the time my mother had [money] to give me." Joyce left school at the age of 15 to have her first child. The first thing she mentions about the child's father is, "he didn't give me nuthing, he didn't give me nothing." (meaning he did not provide her with material support). This comment is quite instructive since it seems to suggest that the need for material support was quite central to the existence of the relationship; perhaps its *raison d'être*. After having the child Joyce started washing clothes for people in her community. At sixteen she had her second child. This child she had for a man other than her first child's father. By 18 she had a third child by yet another man. Again, most instructively, Joyce explains that the first baby's father did not support her or the child. This forced her to resort to getting help from the man who was to become the father of her second child and so on. She had her last child 11 years ago and eventually had 10 children with 5 different men. She lives in a small room with three of her sons, a daughter and three grandchildren. Her other children are adults living on their own. Her eldest child is 29 years old.

### Poverty Across the Generations

Joyce's daughter, Janet, is 21 years old. She is one of the children who live with her mother. Janet has 3 children for three different men. She had her first child at 16. Joyce says of Janet's mating and childbearing pattern, "just like me, the first one not *feeding* her, she have to go and look for another one." The father of Janet's first child is from St. Vincent. Janet worked briefly with the STEP (government sponsored casual labour programme). Her means of support though was from her children's fathers, washing and assistance from Joyce. Janet has no formal skill besides washing. She has no immediate plans for her life. Joyce says she is tired of telling Janet to go and look for work. She says she also tells her not to make any more children.

Janet says even though she is not working now she is interested in doing so. She would take any kind of job and has gone out to look, but has not found any. She says she has no plans. Her eldest child, a girl, is 5 years old. Her mother is her main source of assistance

now in providing for the child. When her mother has nothing Janet says she stays without anything and the child does not go to school. She insists she cannot send the child to school everyday. "Everyday? What if I have nothing? She going and watch children in the eye[a reference to the fact of the child being rendered useless by her not having the items necessary to participate in school]?" Joyce says she has warned Janet that she should not have anymore children. She has two girls and a boy. In spite of the sparseness and squalor of the surroundings the infants of the household all appear well fed, robust and healthy.

### Powerlessness and Fatalism

Janet says she would like everything about her life to be changed. When asked why she does not change it her sense of powerlessness becomes evident as she replies, "how I changing it and there is nothing to do?" She regards washing as her skill, but says she can also comb hair, and do child minding. She would take a course in these areas, "if I could get it." Her plan is that she would pay her mother to look after her children if she got a job. If she could get a job, Janet says, she would change the circumstances of her life. She is relying on Divine intervention through prayer to enable that to happen. She has not accompanied the prayer with any particular works, but says "sometimes if you pray God will make things happen." The role of the local political structures in her impoverishment is brought to the fore when Janet says, "right now the only jobs available are through the STEP programme and they are only giving to those who have already." She is unsure about the future. Her children she says, "could be in the same situation, or it could be much better."

When asked, neither Joyce nor Janet can say what can stop the transmission of poverty across the generations. Janet says she does not plan to have anymore children. Yet, in a way that highlights the recurrent theme of powerlessness and fatalism, she has not done anything to stop herself from conceiving. Janet's daughter is at home today because all her uniforms are dirty, in spite of the fact that her mother is a washer by trade. She does not send her to school also when she has nothing to give her. Janet's own schooling, like that of her mother, grandmother and daughter can be characterized as intermittent. Janet reveals that she did not take the secondary school entrance examinations (Common Entrance) because at the time the family lived outside of town and could not make it into town that day due to a lack of bus fare! This provides insight into what perhaps underlies the sense of disempowerment that seems to characterize her existence, a lifetime of insufficiency inherited across the generations. It is as if these women represent a transmission belt for insufficiency across the generations.

This snapshot of the experiences of mother, daughter, granddaughter and great grand daughter provides insight into the interplay between material deprivation, mind set, fertility, and education and the labour market as it conduces to the reproduction of poverty across the generations.

The 'woman as victim approach' to an understanding of these circumstances would suggest that the fact of poverty impels the poor woman into casual relationships in an

attempt to acquire material gain and sustenance. This same poverty constrains the poor man from meeting his family obligations and undermines the stability of the relationships into which he may enter. The woman is left with the product of the union, which increases her need for material support and propels her into another relationship. The man moves on to another poor woman.<sup>6</sup> Such men often enter into a 'visiting' relationship with these women even whilst being committed to a long term relationship with another family. While some of these men maintain permanent 'visiting' relationships with the women that are socially sanctioned, in many instances the relationship is mostly sexual and devoid of any long term commitment on the man's part.<sup>7</sup>

The next case study attempts to examine the relationships between the variables highlighted above from the man's vantage point.

### **Case Study 3. John Carter, 77 years of age (Antigua-Barbuda)**

Mr. Carter's poverty is intergenerational. His mother was an agricultural labourer who worked on a sugar estate in the east of the country. According to Mr. Carter, "Mi born cum meet dem ah use hoe..mi born cum meet mi ole lady ah work ah estate...so we nuh get much learning cause wi have fi go help she." Mr. Carter's father was a cane cutter. His mother had ten children for his father who then left her and married another woman. Mr. Carter and his nine brothers therefore felt an obligation to assist their mother who struggled to raise her family. He left school at 17 years and worked at the furnace on the estate for 14 years. His mother died when he was 21 years old.

Mr Carter had his first child when he was 19 and four more subsequently(three boys and two girls in total). He had his last child in 1981. He had each child with a different woman. All of his children went to primary school. Two of his sons live overseas, while one lives in the same neighbourhood as he does. This son he, says, would want to provide him with food, but has eight children and is not able to do so. This son works on a boat. Of his two daughters he says in a completely amoral way, "dem work p[on] dem[their] back....dem nuh go no wey go work, but walk and look chance every night." In reply to the question of whether or not his daughters have any children he replies, "one have 3 and one have 4..." His two sons who live abroad supply him with clothes, but never send money. "Up to last week mi get mi parcel from dem."

Mr. Carter stopped working in 1984 when he was 55 years old. He has lived in the area for 14 years. His experiences and his present condition give exemplification to the situation of the chronic poor when they become elderly. He was the child of poor agricultural labourers. Although he went to school until age 17 he did not acquire any

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<sup>6</sup>The fact that the existence of poverty needs to be understood in terms of the totality of the relationships in which the poor is involved is brought out when it is understood that the powerlessness of the women that is being highlighted is often also exploited by non-poor males who might be in a position to obtain sexual favours from them with the expectation that they will provide for the women.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, Dennis. A.V., Understanding Vulnerability: mating fertility and chronic poverty in the Caribbean: Mimeo, March 2007.

certification, or skill that moved him beyond being a labourer. His mother's fertility behaviour (10 children) would have reinforced her material deprivation and lessened her capacity to improve her situation in life.

### **Mating and Family Formation**

A lifetime of low income limited Mr. Carter's ability to meet his manly responsibilities of caring for family and is quite likely related to the instability that seems to attend his relationship with women. He had five children with five different women none of whom he has managed to maintain a relationship with. According to him, "when yuh hear sey mi lef a woman, mi nuh turn back fi haar way again" (Once I have left a woman, I have no more dealings with her). The question of why he has left so many women and not established a stable long term relationship does not seem to be an issue for him. This position amounts to a defence of ego in the face of the absence of a capacity that is associated with masculinity in his society. This approach to familial relationships can be misread as simple worthlessness and irresponsibility. On the other hand, it can be understood as the male response to the structures of deprivation and constraint that is associated with serial mating and early and repeated childbearing on the part of poor women. Both sexes then might be deemed to be adapting to resource deprivation and constraint, in a way that is informed by the gender roles and expectations that prevail in the society and culture.

Because of his age, the outcome of Mr. Carter's mating and fertility activities over a life time can be assessed. Three of his children seem to have continued the tradition of living in poverty that was a feature of the life of Mr. Carter and his mother. His two daughters have between them seven children and like all of the case examined did not receive the education, or training needed to effectively participate in the labour market. One son is so burdened by the responsibility of providing for his eight children that he is not able to assist his father materially in his old age. Mr. Carter's other two sons seem to have escaped the trap of chronic poverty. Both of them have migrated.

The case studies represent a bridge between the macro and micro levels of analysis. They demonstrate the connection between macro contextual variables such as economy, class and institutional structure and micro level variables such as family and gender relations. If the quantitative data painted a picture of socioeconomic deprivation and relatively high levels of fertility, the case studies presented so far have lent substance to this supposed relationship and also demonstrated a connection between chronic poverty and this type of fertility behaviour.

One obvious critique of this type of approach in understanding causal relationships between variables is that the absence of variation in the dependent variable, in this case chronic poverty, prevents definite conclusion about the causal status of the variables. This is addressed in the research by the next case study.

### **Early, multiple fathered childbearing: the case of the non-poor: St. Kitts/Nevis**

Josephine is a 35 year old mother of 5 children. She was born to parents who can be described as Blue Collar and Clerical. Her father was a seaman. At the time of her birth he worked on the inter-island ferry that plied the St. Kitts to Nevis route. Her mother she describes as a sales representative for a number of commercial enterprises (stores). Her mother no longer lives in SKN, but has migrated to Eustacia (near to the British Virgin Islands). She has 4 brothers and two sisters born to her mother. She was the only child her father had with her mother. She reports “mi father have about (approximately) 27 kids.” Josephine was the third to last child for her father, since, she says, all her siblings on his side, but two, are older than her. Her parents were unmarried. Her father she says may have been married to the woman who had the most children for him. Her mother had her six children with five different men.

Josephine’s description of the conditions under which she grew up suggest that her household was poor, but not destitute. Between birth and 12 years old she describes living conditions that were Spartan. Even though they had food, they were not able to afford the more expensive items. They had clothes, but had to sleep on the ground on old sheets and towels because they could not afford beds. Their diet consisted of bread, tin butter, sugar and water, rice lentils, chicken ‘backs and necks’ and root and tree crops (yam, breadfruit) bush tea, eggs from local fowls, fish occasionally. Toilet, bath and kitchen were outside of the house in the yard. The house they lived in consisted of a big bed room, a living room and a third utility room. When Josephine was 12 years old her mother migrated to Puerto Rico and left an older sister in charge of the household. She has never returned to settle in St. Kitts, but returns for visits on a regular basis. She eventually settled in Eustacia on acquiring her British passport.

Josephine attended primary school before going on to high school in the capital Basseterre. Josephine had to drop out of school at 16 because she became pregnant. She says she knew nothing of birth control and abortion was not in style at the time. The local ‘remedy’ was bush tea, but it never seemed to work. She became pregnant for an older man. She attributes her early pregnancy to her own moral shortcomings. She was forced to enter the labour market after her pregnancy as at that time there was no possibility of re-entering school. She went to work in a hotel and later as a store clerk. She says common sense is very important and feels she was able to function well in the job market in spite of her lack of certification because of it.

Josephine went on to have four more children. Her children are aged 20, 17, 14, 12 and 2. She had her children with five different men. She attributes the fact that she did not stay with any one man to infidelity on their part. She mentions that when you have more than one baby’s father you get more money, but insists this was not a motivating factor for her. She says that men whether they are single or married are not able to confine themselves to one woman. Of this she says, “is life.” According to her, if a man lives with her and sees another woman and wishes to be with her she will not accept him lying to her. She prefers him to say to her, “I have another girlfriend and it is up to you if you want to stick around. Not for him to be with me and then lying about his other

relationship.” Furthermore, she says when the other woman sees you she expresses disrespect by saying such things as, “watch she nuh, look how she going on...” She says that these men lived with her rather than the other way around. She was a working woman and was able to have her own place. She says that she managed her money well and makes a distinction between ‘wants’ and ‘needs.’ She reports, “I work for the government, EC\$1565 monthly) I does get.” She saves some and pays her bills. She also receives income in the form of support from the fathers of two of her children EC\$400 per child (2.7 EC = 1 US\$).

### **Family and Gender relations**

Josephine still interacts with some of the fathers of her children. The father of the first child still provides her with items of clothing from time to time. The father of the second child has been in prison for the past 16 years while the father of the third child died when the child was still a baby. It is the father of her last two children, her girls, from whom she receives child support. She describes herself as ‘single.’ Josephine says, “as I tell you, the way how things going you just have to stay focused, try to hold on to your job and let the man dem go (do not become preoccupied with them). Why you should stuck-up under a man to gain not much and you [are] working?... Josephine continues, St Kitts has a dirty trend, man ah bite, man ah bite man woman (infidelity is widespread). Sometimes me and you get together all is well then we start to fight. Why man must hit woman? Why do they argue? Those are the things I cant live with... and in St. Kitts it going always happen. I does sit back and watch. You know the amount of people I see get married and up to today they are at war? So why would I go and get married? Some of them aint done pay off for the wedding and the marriage done broke up (they have not finished paying for the expenses associated with the wedding and it is already over)?” Still, she does acknowledge that there are good relationships.

In the rearing of her children she has had good support from the fathers themselves or where they were not available their relatives. One of her sons became rebellious and was confined by the State. She says she just left him there until it was time for him to come out. One child has just finished taking his high school leaving examinations and is hoping to go on to do his A level examinations. Her 14 year old son lives in Anguilla and is accustomed to coming first in his form. He lives with his grandmother. Her daughter of 11 years of age has just passed the examination to enter high school. Her first child is a high school graduate and is working. He and is 17 year old brother are actively planning to migrate to St. Thomas (to his father) and the USA respectively (to his father’s sister). Migration has obviously been an important means of social mobility for this family.

Josephine’s case is the counterfactual to the other cases we have looked at. In spite of early and repeated pregnancy she has managed to find a favourable place on the job market and has become an independent lower level professional. Neither is she likely to pass on her childhood poverty to her children. In her case the migration option pursued by her mother that enabled her to provide support for Josephine has made a significant difference to her life and the chances she has encountered. Furthermore, her children have also benefited from migration, or seem set to benefit from it

**Conclusion: Is the relationship between mating, family formation and intergenerational poverty causal?**

The analysis seems to suggest a need to step back from a focus on the characteristics of the poor to an examination of the broader context within which poverty exists. The fact that the mating pattern that has been described is to be found among poor as well as non-poor suggests that it cannot be a causal factor of intergenerational poverty. In many ways the mating and family patterns we have been examining represent coping mechanisms and adaptations to harsh socioeconomic circumstances. They are also a part of the cultural tradition of Caribbean people, a stock of patterned responses that is a part of their historical legacy and which is reinforced by socioeconomic structures of the present. It helps to shape the choices that they make. These mechanisms sometimes allow the poor to escape their poverty and they sometimes reinforce their poverty across the generations. However, the practices engaged in by the poor should not obfuscate the role of the broader set of factors that provide the context within which these choices are made.

The fact of multiple births with more than one man does not condemn a woman and her offspring to poverty. What matters is the play of the forces of class and social relations that determine the nature of the opportunity structure with which individuals are confronted. This argument is being advanced even while recognizing the dialectical nature of the relationship between social structure and human agency. Agency shapes structure, but only within the confines of the opportunities allowed by structure. Mating patterns in and of themselves are not determinants of poverty or intergenerational poverty. However they might serve to reinforce poverty and transmit it across the generations depending on the other limitations that the individual's circumstances impose.

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**Contact Information:**

Dennis A.V. Brown, PhD  
Dept. of Behavioural Sciences,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of the West Indies  
St. Augustine Campus.  
Trinidad and Tobago, W.I.  
Telephone 1868 662 2002 ext 3053, 2539  
Email: dennis.dbrown@gmail.com

