“Social Realities of the Poor”
Irene Y.H. Ng
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Outline of Presentation

1. Framework
2. Poverty attitudes
3. Poverty facts
4. Faith-based value proposition
5. What next? Let’s discuss
Poverty Attitudes Facts

Historical/political  Race/religion

Ideology/values

Societal Response
**Poverty Attitudes**

Feagin (1974)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualistic</th>
<th>Situational</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal deficits</td>
<td>Catastrophic event</td>
<td>Unfavourable conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>Exploitation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of opportunities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Policy intervention depends on which view/set of factors dominate
Increased stigmatization of the poor

## Singaporean Attitudes

### Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Singapore (%)</th>
<th>Poor (%)</th>
<th>Britain (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition of poverty</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>One is poor if he/she has:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q1: enough to buy the things they need, but not things people take for granted</td>
<td>17.72</td>
<td>33.78</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: enough to eat and live but not buy the things they need</td>
<td>44.27</td>
<td>44.59</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: not enough to eat and live without getting into debt</td>
<td>83.76</td>
<td>74.32</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Singaporean Attitudes

**Survey Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Singapore (%) n= 440</th>
<th>Poor (%) n= 74</th>
<th>Britain (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q5: Poor people in Singapore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Very few</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Few</td>
<td>43.97</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>}39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Many</td>
<td>43.97</td>
<td>51.39</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Singaporean Attitudes

Causes of poverty

- Inevitable
- Injustice
- Laziness/lack of willpower
- Unlucky

Singapore
Poor
UK
Cycle of Poverty

**Individual:** low education / discouragement

**Structural:** wage depression

**Structural:** job loss

**Situational:** injury
### Poverty Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference Year</th>
<th>Measurement Method</th>
<th>Poverty Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absolute Poverty Estimates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeoh Lam Keong, <em>mimeo</em> (2013)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Using household income of S$1,250 (2012 AHEBN estimate) to S$1,500 per month as a poverty line. Estimated number of working poor + unemployed poor + retired poor households based on data from the Department of Statistics (DOS) for 2011.</td>
<td>10–12 per cent or 110,000–140,000 Singapore resident households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Loh, <em>Social Space “Bottom Fifth in Singapore”</em> (2011)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Using S$1,500 as a poverty line (the qualifying level for many ComCare schemes in 2011) and looking at the income distribution across quintiles for all households, not only “employed households.” This data is only available every five years from the Household Expenditure Survey (HES).</td>
<td>12–14 per cent or 130,000–150,000 Singapore resident households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below Social Inclusion Level Estimates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Straits Times, <em>“Widening Wage Gap, Does It Matter?”</em> (2010)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Reports that a family of four would need S$2,500–S$3,000 per month to reach the social inclusion level of income. (Estimated by LCSI from 2007/2008 Household Expenditure Survey.)</td>
<td>23–26 per cent or 250,000–280,000 Singapore resident households with monthly incomes below S$3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Poverty Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIVE POVERTY ESTIMATES</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>Using 50 per cent of median household income amongst resident households, relative poverty line is at $2,500.</th>
<th>20–22 per cent of all households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lien Centre analysis based on the HES 2007/08</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Measuring relative poverty through estimation of workers that are eligible for the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) when it was first introduced in 2007. Eligibility criteria included having a monthly salary of less than $1,500.</td>
<td>26 per cent or about one out of four workers would have been potential beneficiaries of the WIS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Estimates of Poverty in Singapore Using Various Monetary Measures.

Multi-stressed Low-income Families

Being Poor in Wealthy Singapore

• Cash poor, asset rich
• Multiple barriers
  – Education & skills
  – Technology access
  – Language
  – Physical and psycho-emotional challenges
  – Family issues
• Neighbourhood-bound
• Wide media exposure

* RELATIVE POVERTY/INEQUALITY
God cares about poverty, and how His children respond to poverty

“‘Among my people are the wicked who lie in wait like men who snare birds
And like those who set traps to catch people.
Like cages full of birds,
Their houses are full of deceit;
They have become rich and powerful
And have grown fat and sleek.”

Jeremiah 5:26-29
God cares about poverty, and how His children respond to poverty

Their evil deeds have no limit;
They do not seek justice.
They do not promote the case of the fatherless;
They do not defend the cause of the poor.
Should I not punish them for this?’ declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah 5:26-29
So what?

**Government**
- Ensure social protection

**Society?**
- People of faith?
  - Church?
Poverty

Attitudes

Facts

Societal Response

Historical/political

Race/religion

Ideology/values
Value Proposition

People of faith have a moral and social obligation towards the poor

=> How to:

• Live in solidarity with the poor?

• Live counter-culturally in a blatantly wealth-conscious society?
“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

‘never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you’
So we say with confidence,

‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
‘what can man do to me?’”

Hebrews 13:5,6