Low-Income Workers Perceptions About a Living Wage in the Tshwane Municipality

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Abstract: A living wage is predicted as one of the panaceas to take low-remuneration workers out of the poverty trap, to empower and sustain them to live a dignified life. In the literature it is argued that low-remuneration workers work in precarious jobs globally. Theoretically a living wage is predicted by many factors, but for the purpose of this study the focus was on gender, the economic sector, benefits and employment status. With the exception of economic sector, the other factors and living wage are associated with these United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals: 1 (poverty reduction), 8 (decent wage) and 10 (gender parity). In terms of the former, it is argued that the wage gap is a reality in the workplaces because males still earn higher than females. Research show that low-remuneration workers still earn wages that still traps them in poverty, and their working condition are not conducive. A quantitative cross-sectional survey approach was adopted while convenience sampling was used to select respondents (n=205), since the researcher did not have a sampling frame. A validated questionnaire was used to collect the data. Logistic regression was deemed appropriate to use, since the perception of a living wage was binary. The main finding showed a positive relationship between employment status and a living wage while the variables of benefits and economic sector decreased the likelihood of low-income workers to perceive their remuneration as a living wage by 46% and 40% respectively. Additionally, low-income workers who were employed on a permanent basis, were 3.8 times more likely to perceive their remuneration as a living wage. Findings from the study are key for policy makers and researchers as we benchmark the tipping point between paying reasonable wage and profits. The implication is that organisations should offer employees benefits, like medical aid, education, and training, so that they can have medical aid and improve their skills or competency levels; ensure that non-permanent employees work hours that will allow them to afford basic needs while perception studies should be done prior to the implementation of a living wage that is determined by calculating labour economic variables.

Keywords: Economic sector, Employment status, Gender, Living wage

1. Introduction

A living wage is an emotive and labour economics construct (Swarts & Vasi, 2011), and the challenge is that scholars are divided about its implementation (Maleka, Rugimbana, Carr, Meyer, Parker & Barry, 2018). There are those who argue that it can be used as a strategy to retain workers (Zeng & Honig 2017), and those who believe that its implementation will lead to job losses (Bendix, 2015; Godfrey, Maree, Du Toit & Theron, 2014) due to mechanisation (Levy & Venter, 2015). It is also argued that paying wages above the market leads to job losses, and employees end up passing the cost to consumers through the increasing price of products (Mohr & Fourie, 2004). Employees who are exploited and do not earn a living wage embark on strikes that adversely affect production (Berry et al., 2017; Dlangamadla, Jika, Ledwada, Mosamo, Saba & Sadiki, 2013; Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus & Jordaan, 2016). The other view, from international scholars in the United States of America and New Zealand, is that employers and employees should endeavour to find a tipping point – that is, a point where employers are profitable and employees are at the same time earning a living wage that will allow them to live a dignified life (Berry, Reichman, Scott & Carr, 2017).

Recently, it was discovered by collecting data directly from human resource management professionals earning R40 000.00 and above that they were not happy with their wages (Maleka, Swarts & Mmako, 2018). There are challenges in implementing a living wage (Carr, Maleka, Meyer, Barry, Parker & Haar, 2018).

It had been established in Cambodia, that the trade union did not know the living wage amount they should be bargain for (Chandararot & Dannet, 2009). In South Africa, there is no living wage legislation like in Canada (Zeng & Honig 2017). South Africa is a member Brasil, Russia, India, and South Africa (BRICS) countries, and it does not have a living wage policy low-remuneration workers (Bendix, 2015). In India, one of the BRICS countries a living wage was estimated to be 19400 rupees per month (Trading Economics, 2018). Previous research focussed on how the perceived living wage affected the levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Maleka & Schultz, 2018). Other research in Tshwane focussed on the narratives of employees earning below and above the estimated living wage (Maleka, 2016), and predictors of living wages (Maleka, 2017). Smith (2016) argued that Tshwane has a highest remuneration per capita in South Africa (R79 100 per annum).

The city of Tshwane has an unemployment rate of 29.9% and the labour absorption rate of 69.9%. The unemployment was 0.9% higher than the national unemployment rate (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The major economic sectors are automotive, services and government, and Tshwane contributed 26.8% to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Gauteng Province (Statistics South Africa, 2011). However, there is gap in Tshwane living wage research that collected the data from low-income workers to determine how categorical variables (employment status, gender, and benefits predicts) are perceived to predict a living wage. In order to address gap, this study answers this research question: Are male employees who work in bigger firms or in production, who earn benefits and are permanent employees more likely to perceive their remuneration as a living wage as compared to the other groups? In the next section, the living wage is explained from human capability approach will also be discussed in the theoretical framework section. The research methodology to address the research question is discussed. The study results are also discussed, and the paper ends with comparing the results to other studies, discussing study limitations and providing recommendations.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are many definitions of the living wage; however, the definition applicable in this study is that the living wage is remuneration that enables employees to cover their household costs, save, and live a dignified life (Anker, 2011). It is a wage that has been predicted that it might be panacea to that take low-remuneration workers working mainly precarious jobs out of poverty (Berry, Reichman, Scott & Carr, 2017). Since living wage is closely related to poverty reduction, precarious jobs and gender parity it can be argued that it is associated with Sustainable Development Goals 1, 8 and 10. In 2016, the World Bank stated that half of the low-remuneration workers globally earned less than $1.90 per day. This seems to suggest that even when they were working, they were still poor (Carr et al., 2018). In South Africa, they are employees who earn between R4000 to R11 000 (Maleka, 2017). This study, did not follow econometrics approach that aggregate macro-economic data to determine a living wage, it followed an approach where the data were collected from the low-remuneration workers (Maleka et al., 2018). This approach of including employees to determine the wage levels, using variables like gender, job title, tenure, is known as human resource agile reward strategy (Thoren, 2017).

2.1 Capability Approach to Living Wage

Human capability approach was introduced by Sen, an economist from India, who argued that the living wage calculation should not focus mainly econometrics, but is should focus on how give employees freedom to live a dignified life (Maleka, Schultz, Van Hoek, Paul-Dachapalli & Ragadu, 2021). As it can be observed from Figure 1, there are three lines that explain the living wage from a human capability approach. The black solid line shows that the relationship between the living wage and human capability (i.e. gender) is linear. The blue S-Shaped, show that employees who are earning below a threshold live in poverty. On the other hand, the employees who earn above the threshold have a freedom to live a dignified life. The blue dotted line is about employees being paid any amount.

Sen's approach has influenced living wage research conducted by industrial psychologist and human resource management from New Zealand and South Africa (Carr et al., 2018). In the United States of America, Reed and Bogardus (2012) claimed that HRM researchers influenced by Sen's approach, can conduct a survey to determine whether employees perceive benefits, economic sector, employment status and gender as predictors of living wage.
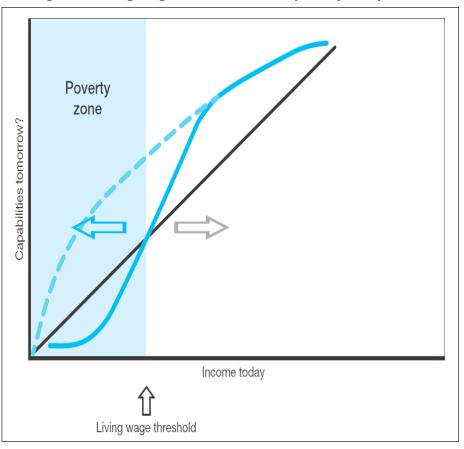
Figure 1: Living Wage from a Human Capability Perspective

Source: Carr *et al.* (2018)

2.2 Predictors of Living Wage

The discussion below is about benefits, economic sector, employment status, and gender as predictors of a living wage.

2.2.1 Benefits as a Predictor of a Living Wage

Bussin (2016) argues that employee benefits, such as housing subsidies, medical aid, and provident funds allow employees to live a dignified life. It has been found that, in South Africa, benefits contribute 25% to employees' wages (Baker, Yu & Roos, 2018). Benefits like training give employees the opportunities to enhance their skills, and as a result they might be promoted, earn better wages, and perform optimally (Van Aswegen, 2012). Furthermore, a study based on Human Development Theory showed that a benefit like education was the strongest predictor of the living wage (Gao, Schmidt, Gill & Pratt, 2011). It has been found that increases in employees' wages and benefits are an effective retention strategy (Howes, 2005). Based on the discussion it is hypothesized that:

H1: Employees earning benefits are more likely to earn a living wage as compared with those who do not earn benefits.

2.2.2 Economic Sector as a Predictor of a Living Wage

Wages in the production sector in South Africa, especially in construction, electricity, and mining, are driven by collective bargaining, which means that, since 2005 onward, wage increases have been above the consumer prices index (Baker et al., 2018). According to Valodia and Francis (2018), employees in the non-production sector (i.e., wholesale, finance, and retail) earn lower wages. This is due to employees' skill levels and the size of the enterprises or firms (Baker et al., 2018). It had been established that in some instances employees in bigger firms accept lower wages, if they are aware that they might be replaced by machines, and develop themselves so that they are promoted (Davies, 2015). Generally, employers in bigger firms pay employees higher wages than employees in smaller firms due to economies of scale (Mueller,

Simitntzi & Quimet, 2015). Experience, education and tenure are other variables considered by employers in bigger firms not to pay employees' equal wages (Bussin, 2018). Employees in the agriculture sector do not earn the same as employees who produce products, like in mining (Finn, 2015).

H2: Employees working in bigger firms or in production sector are more likely to perceive their remuneration as a living wage as compared to those who work in small firms.

2.2.3 Employment Status as a Predictor of a Living Wage

Employees who are employed on a permanent basis are more likely to earn higher wages because their unions negotiate for better and dignified wages (Baker et al., 2018). On the contrary, casual or non-permanent workers are paid less because they sometimes work fewer hours (Linneker & Willis, 2016), are susceptible to poor working conditions, and earn wages that trap them in poverty (Bailey, 2016). In Canada and Los Angeles, there are living wage campaigns to improve the working conditions and wage levels of employees who are not employed on a permanent basis (Hannan, Bauder & Sheilds, 2016). International data in the United Kingdom showed that to curb high levels of youth employment, they were given temporary internship contract paid a lower level, and when they were employed on a permanent they earned a living and decent wage (Davies, 2015).

H3: Employee who are permanently employed are more likely to perceive their remuneration as a living wage as compared to employees who are hired on a non-permanent basis.

2.2.4 Gender as a Predictor of a Living Wage

The literature in Africa and internationally consistently indicates that males are more likely to earn a living wage as compared to females (Alize, 2011; Dube, Lester & Reich, 2016; Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016; Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2016). Tandrayen-Ragoobur (2016:222) opines that "the literature in wage gaps [between males and females] in Africa is limited." Alize (2011) is of the view that, when wage gapes between males and females are reduced, females will be less susceptible to family violence. To empower females, a proposition is that women should be the beneficiaries of the implementation of a living wage policy in Ireland and in the United Kingdom (Bargain, Doorley & Van Kerm, 2016).

H4: Males are more likely to perceive their remuneration as a living wage as compared to females.

Mathematically the study theoretical framework is written as follows:

$$\text{Odds }(\textit{living wage}) = e^{\,\beta_0 + \beta_1\,(\text{benefits}) + \beta_2\,(\text{economic sector}) + \beta_3\,(\text{employment status}) + \beta_4\,(\text{Gender})}$$

Where

- e is an exponent;

- β_0 is a constant;

- β_2; and

- Benefits, economic sector, employment status are and gender are categorical predictors.

In the next section, the methodology followed in this study is discussed.

3. Methodological Approach

The research design was a cross-sectional survey (Struwig & Stead, 2013). The data were collected from May to July 2018 using a convenience sampling technique. As suggested by Bless, Higson-Smith, and Sithole (2013), a non-probability sampling technique was used since the researcher did not have a sampling frame. A validated questionnaire was used to collect the data. Section A of the questionnaire comprised biographical data (refer to Table 1). Section B of the questionnaire comprised a job satisfaction scale developed by Spector (1985), and for the purpose of this study, only benefits items were selected. The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.82, which was within the 0.60 to 0.90 reliability range suggested by Maree (2016). Prior to data collection, content validity was achieved by presenting the questionnaire to human resource experts at the university. The outcome variable was employees' perception living wage, where respondents selected "yes" or "no" responses. Since the outcome (i.e. perception of living wage) variable was binary (0=No, 1=Yes), logistic regression was deemed an appropriate statistical test as suggested by Hosmer, Lemeshow, and Sturdivant (2013). Female was coded as 0 and male was coded as 1. Economic sector was classified into two categories: production and non-production. Production was coded as 0 and non-production was coded as 1, and non-permanent was coded as

0 and permanent was coded as 1. The data were analysed in analysed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25. The researcher was given ethical clearance by a university in South Africa. Prior to data collection, the respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their identities were anonymised and kept confidential by not asking them information that could be linked to them.

4. Results

Discussed in this section are the descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (logistic regression) and results from the Loess curve.

4.1 Descriptive Data

The data showed that 107 out 204 (52.2%) of the respondents were female, and 109 out of 166 (65.7%) of the respondents were working in the non-production economic sector. The majority of the respondents, 105 out of 184 (65.7%), were not employed on a permanent basis.

On average, respondents earned R6 633.80, which was within the range of R4000.00 and R11 000.00 predicted in the Maleka (2017). Presented next are the logistic regression data.

4.2 Logistic Regression

Logistic regression does not have a multicollinearity command. As suggested by Leech, Barret, and Morgan (2016), the variance inflation factor (VIF) was calculated using the linear regression command. Field (2013) opines that a VIF value close to 1 shows that there are no multicollinearity issues. The VIF formula is as follows: VIF = $\sum$ VIF/k i=1. K is the number of independent variables. The VIF values were as follows: economic sector (1.03), employment status (1.07), benefits (1.07) and gender (1.0.4). Adding all the VIFs and dividing them by k=3 equalled 1.05. The data in Table 2 show that the model as a whole explained between 28.90% (Cox & Snell R) and 39.80% (Nagelkerke R) square variance of in perception of living wage.

The data in Table 3 show that the chi-square for the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test was 5.01 with a significant value of 0.756. According to Pallant (2016), since the significant value was larger than 0.05, the data supported the model. The classification percentage was 70.5%. Classification percentage value

Table 1: Biographical Data

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male (98) Female (107)	Male (47.8%) Female (52.2%)
Economic sector	Production (57) Non-production (109) Missing (39)	Production (34.3%) Non-production (65.7%)
Employment status	Permanent (79) Non-permanent (105) Missing (21)	Permanent (57.1%) Non-permanent (42.69%)

Source: Authors

Table 2: Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R square	Nagelkerke R square
1	150.023a	0.298	0.398 a
Estimation terminated at iteration 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.			

Source: Authors

Table 3: Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
1	5.014	8	0.756

Source: Authors

Table 4: Perceived Living Wage and Categorical Predictors

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	**Upper**
Step 1a	Benefits	-0.777	0.174	19.853	1	0.000	0.460	0.327	0.647
	Economic sector	-0.997	0.424	5.530	1	0.019	0.369	0.161	0.847
	Employment status	1.338	0.416	10.346	1	0.001	3.811	1.686	8.611
	Gender	0.568	0.568	1.945	1	0.163	1.765	0.794	3.922
	Constant	2.571	1,224	4.409	1	0.036	13.077		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: benefits, economic sector, employment status and gender.

Based on the study results, H3 is supported and H1, H2 and H4 are not supported. The data statistical or mathematical model is written as follows:

$$\text{Odds (living wage)} = e^{\,2.571 - 0.777 \text{(benefits)} - 0.997 \text{(economic sector)} + 1.33 \text{(employment status)}}$$

Source: Authors

indicates "how well the model is able to predict the correct category for each case" (Pallant, 2016:177).

Presented in Table 4 is the full model with all the predictors (i.e., benefits, economic sector, and employment status). It was significant, with χ2 (4, N=205) = 51.69, p <0.01, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who perceived their remuneration as a living wage and those who did not perceive their remuneration as a living wage. Benefits were the least predictor of perceived living wage, recording an odd ratio of 0.460. Since the odds ratio was less than 1, this indicated respondents who received benefits were 0.460 times less likely to perceive that they were paid a living wage than those who did not receive benefits, controlling for all other predictors in the model. Economic sector was the second highest predictor of perceived living wage, recording an odds ratio of 0.369. Since the odds ratio was less than 1, it suggested that employees in the production sector were 0.369 times less likely to perceive that they were paid a living wage than those who worked in the non-production economic sector, controlling for all other predictors in the model. Employment status was the strongest predictor of perceived living wage, recording an odds ratio of 3.81. This suggested that employees employed on a permanent basis were 3.81 times more likely to perceive that they were paid a living wage than those who were employed on a non-permanent basis, controlling for all other factors in the model. Gender was not a significant predictor. All the beta scores were all positive, and this indicated a positive relationship between three significant independent variables and predicted probability. This can be interpreted that when either benefits, economic sector or employment status increase, the predictive probability increased, thus increasing the likelihood that a respondent would be categorised as having a perception of earning a living wage.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge by determining how low-remuneration workers in Tshwane municipality perceive their remuneration as a living wage. The data showed that respondents positively perceived benefits as a predictor of a living wage. This finding is in similar with international research (Gao et al., 2011). It can be interpreted from the data that the respondents were aware that benefits contributed to their wages (Baker et al., 2018). Not offering benefits to employees (e.g. training and education) is not in line with Human Development Theory (Gao et al., 2011), and contributes to South Africa's ranking of 118 out of 187 on the human development index (Mohr, Yu & Mollentze, 2016).

The data showed that employees who are working a production and bigger firms are less likely to perceive their wages as a living wage. Davies (2015) established that employees working bigger international firms are most likely to accept lower wages when they know that they might be replaced by machines, instead they opt to develop themselves so that they might be promoted. On the contrary, Mueller et al. (2015) opined that bigger firms pay a living wage due to economies of scale. In South

Africa, in another study conducted at a production firm where employees were earning an average of R8 000 (Dlangamadla et al., 2013), which was within the living wage range of R4 000 to R11 000 (Maleka et al., 2017), employees did not perceive their wages as a living wage. The implication for managers in the mining firm was that employees perceived R12 500 as a living wage and embarked on a violent strike where 34 mineworkers were gunned by the police (Dlangamadla et al., 2013).

The data showed that permanently employed employees perceived their wages as living wages. International research showed that permanently employees were paid higher than their non-permanent counterparts, because they worked longer hours (Linneker & Willis, 2016). In South Africa, it is argued that unions negotiate a living wage for employees (Baker et al., 2018). This data seems to suggest that employees who are hired on a temporary basis, work in precarious jobs and are not paid a living wage that would empower and sustain them to live a dignified life. It can be interpreted that non-permanent workers earned less than $1.90 a day and can be classified as the working poor (Carr et al., 2018). In 2016, low-income workers in three universities in Tshwane municipality embarked on a strike, and they were eventually hired on a permanent basis. Their base salary was R5000.00 plus benefits like medical aid and tuition subsidy (Maleka, 2017).

This study had limitations. Firstly, a non-probability sampling technique was used to select respondents, hence its results cannot be generalised. Secondly, the study was based on a cross-sectional research design which only gave a single snapshot about employees' perceptions perception about the living wage. The sample was not symmetric in terms in terms of respondents working in the production and non-production economic sectors and respondents' employment status. There were more respondents who were working who were not permanently employed. Despite these limitations, this study further contributed to the living wage discourse by showing that paying employees a living wage using labour economics variables like benefits does not necessarily lead to positive perceptions. In South Africa, evidence showed that, even when a production firm paid a living wage, employees perceived another figure as a living wage and embarked on a strike that adversely affected production and profit (Dlangamadla et al., 2013).

Further research should be conducted in other municipalities to solicit employees' perceptions about the living wage. A comparative study should be conducted in India, China, Brazil and South Africa. Labour economics variables like firm size, productivity, household, location or city, inflation, economic indicators (e.g. growth, transport costs), and the impact of living wage on company shares should be measured. The recommendations for organisations are as follows:

- Make an awareness campaign about how benefits, economic sector and employment status contribute to the living wage;

- Offer employees benefits, like medical aid, education, and training, so that they can have medical aid and improve their skills or competency levels;

- Ensure that non-permanent employees work hours that will allow them to afford basic needs;

- Conduct perception studies prior to the implementation of a living wage that is determined by calculating labour economic variables.

In conclusion, it can be argued that, the beta scores showed a positive relationship employment status and a living wage. The relationship between economic, benefits and living wage was negative. The exponential or odd ratio results showed that benefits and economic sector decreased the likelihood of low-income workers to perceive their remuneration as a living wage by 46% and 37% respectively. Lastly, low-income workers who were employed on a permanent basis, were 3.8 times more likely to perceive their remuneration as a living wage.

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