

# A Social Profile of Belize City

Myrtle Palacio

## Introduction

This paper is an overview of the social profile of Belize City, and was written specifically for this forum. To my knowledge, no one has previously done a quantitative study on the topic. I believe that most Belizeans have at the back of their minds an awareness of the socio-economic profile of Belize City. But this awareness is based on innate feelings only. As Belize is a small society which is growing rapidly, such gut-reaction has limitations. We have to start regular, systematic studies of the situation, quantifying and documenting the results and passing the results on to posterity.

My findings are still crude. They are a first level of quantification and analysis. Even though only a "first" or initial effort, the paper has merits that are appropriate for this forum. To my understanding, the forum is intended to encourage scholars to devote particular attention to the situation while sharing information, clarifying concepts, methods, analyses, and evaluating the usefulness of the research thrust. As the saying goes – if you do not share, you do not learn. I hope that as a result of this sharing we will all be better informed, and that there will be possibilities of collaboration in further research and analytical work. With this in mind, I particularly welcome your constructive criticism.

I would like to thank SPEAR for the opportunity to share at this forum. The work has been difficult, time consuming and expensive. These features will characterize

future efforts but they should not discourage others, for the results are truly rewarding.

## Objective

I have tremendous experience in conducting and participating in socio/cultural research work at all levels. Glessima has collected data on several aspects of the Belizean society. I have had first hand experience in political canvassing which involved quite a large amount of data gathering. This however is my first opportunity to share quantified information in a forum of this kind in Belize.

Secondly, I regard this as a challenge. As business persons whose primary concern should be profit, we, at Glessima, also have a strong social commitment to our community. This gives us the opportunity to think and to perform at a different level rather than purely "business".

Lastly, this information is long overdue. It is information that people and organizations with direct or indirect penetration into the society should already have. To name only a few – those in consumer research, utility organizations, health service organizations, community development/urban planning organizations, politicians, business persons and educators. Presently they are all drowning in data but have very little information.

## Source of Data

The data came from two areas. Firstly the (UNFPA) United Nations Fund for

Population Activity Survey funded a (KAP) Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice Survey in 1985/86. The main objective of the survey was to gather and process data on child-bearing and child rearing practices. The sample was women of child-bearing age (15-49), from a list of households nationwide that had been randomly selected by the Central Statistical Office.

The second source came from a Belize City Comprehensive Urban Development Project Survey (BCCUDP) funded by McGill University in Canada with assistance from UWI. It was a survey of opinions of housewives in Belize City completed December, 1987. Although the emphasis was on topics associated with urban planning, the survey report discusses economic patterns, community involvement, and geographical mobility. The sample of 298 was randomly selected by Glessima using data from the Voters' Registration List.

## Method

With the help of the two softwares, Survey Mate by Dr. Henry Elkins and Dbase III by Ashton Tate, data was entered from completed questionnaires. Glessima isolated data for Belize City from the UNFPA Survey. There were 385 cases for Belize City from 1,100 nationwide. Out of 256 variables, I selected twenty-one to satisfy my topic. They are as follows:

District where born, marital union status, education level, women who bring in cash, the skills of these women, household headship, occupation of household head, religion, whether home is owned or rented, number of bedrooms in the home, whether home owns a fridge,

plumbing, TV, radio, socio-economic status, number of persons in household, number of children in household.

The data for the BCCUDP Survey was useful, particularly its focus on community involvement and environment. The information from this section is enlightening as to the social behavior of respondents. The addresses on the Voters' Registration List were used as a guide to locating households. Again, as in the UNFPA Survey, women or "housewives" were the informants. The reason given was that it is more expedient to find and interview women. Also that in an extended family situation it is the woman who assumes most of the decision-making in the affairs of the household. The statistical output were primarily frequency distribution by variables broken down into numeric frequency, percentage, and cumulative percentage, as well as cross-tabulations.

## Sample

The sample for Belize City from the UNFPA Survey were residents from fifteen randomly selected enumeration districts. The areas for this study are bounded roughly by the following streets:

1. Queen St./Hydes Lane/Barrack Rd/Grants Alley
2. Eyre St./Cork St./Fort St./North Park St.
3. Baymen Ave./"C" St./Landivar
4. Victoria St./Castle St.
5. Rectory Lane/Regent St./Palm Lane
6. Plues St./George St./Rocky Rd.
7. Bagdad St./Mosul St./Vernon St.

8. West Canal St./Tigris St.
9. Wagners Lane/East Canal St.
10. Amara Ave./Euphrates Ave./Mex Ave./East Collet St.
11. Vernon St./Lindo's Alley/East Collet Canal
12. Neal Pen Rd./Supal St.
13. Dolphin St./Iguana St./Raccoon St.
14. Orange St./West Collet Canal St.
15. Cemetery Road

For the BCCUDP Survey, we allocated the number of names to each constituency proportionate to its size among the others. Lake Independence was the largest (2,707) with Freetown as the smallest, (2,080). The breakdown is as follows:

**Table I: Constituency by size and Number of Respondents**

Constituency	Size	Sample	Respondents
Port Loyola	2,647	30	21
Lake Independence	2,707	34	32
Collet	2,207	28	22
Queens Square	2,654	32	31
Albert	2,250	29	24
Mesopotamia	2,536	32	31
Caribbean Shores	2,397	30	30
Pickstock	2,278	29	28
Fort George	2,378	29	22
Freetown	2,080	25	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,134</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>266</b>

The above-mentioned information also shows the number of persons/respondents actually interviewed in each constituency.

## Findings

The findings will be divided into two parts. Firstly, there is an overview, giving detailed information on each selected variable mentioned in the method. Secondly, I have selected three of these variables for cross-tabulations with the others. The three variables, socio-economic status, household headship (men/women) and area of residence will be treated separately showing the significance of each one and its relationship to other variables; for example, socio-economic status and how it affects housing ownership.

## Part One

### Overview

Some sixty-six percent (66%) of the persons interviewed were born in Belize City and 7% were from the Belize Rural. Every district was represented. Therefore, some 28% of those interviewed were born in other parts of the country. However, the number for each was not significant. People originating in the Stann Creek District were most frequent with 8%, followed by Cayo District with 6%, Toledo and Corozal 5% each; Orange Walk 2%. The percentage for persons born out of the country was also minimal at 2%.

For marital status, the three most frequent were married 43%, common-law 20%, visiting 18%, and single, 19%. If married and common-law unions can be regarded as stable unions then 63% of the cases are in stable relationships.

Level of education was divided into six categories; namely, those who did not complete primary school, completed primary school, not complete high school, completed high school, post secondary, and university. Table II shows that the most frequent was finished primary school, 35%. This is closely followed by

those who finished high school.

If some categories are to be lumped together, for example, 1 and 5 as primary school level; 2 and 3 high school level; 4 and 6 as tertiary level, then one can assume that 45% of the Belize City population have attained the primary school level, that 41% attained the high school level, and some 14% the tertiary level. It reflects a fairly high educational achievement at the pre-tertiary level.

Ethnicity is a variable in this research which also showed some interesting information. There was only one Maya/Kekchi respondent, while 68% were Creoles, 18% were of Mestizo descent, 6% Garinagu, and 4% Caucasians.

Some 49% of the women were involved in some economic activity to bring cash into the household. Of this amount 39% were involved in full-time activity.

The household head was male for 64% and female for 36% of the households. The skills of the household heads fall into the main categories of unskilled and skilled. Specifically some 38% were unskilled and the most frequent, skilled, had 56%.

Home ownership was very significant with 56% renting and 44% owning homes. Although nearly all the households own a radio and TV, 96% and 91% respectively,

**Table II: Education Level**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
1. Finished Primary School	134	35
2. Finished High School	96	25
3. Not Finished High School	62	16
4. Post Secondary		

yet only 55% had plumbing facilities (plumbed household) – that is running water, sewerage, etc. Of this amount, 56% were rented.

Table III below reflects the size of some 43% of the households that had 2 bedrooms. There were more one-bedroom homes than the larger three plus bedroom homes. Most rented homes were

**Table III: Size of Homes in Number of Bedrooms**

# Bedrooms	% of Homes
One	14
Two	43
Three	29
Four	9
Five	3

one and two bedroom homes.

The number of persons residing in each household ranged from one to seventeen. The average was six persons. Also the number of children in each household ranged from zero to twelve with the average being four. Significant also, was the type of household – 50% extended and 48% conjugal.

Socio-economic status was divided into three categories: high, middle and low.

**Table IV: Travel Destination by Travel Purpose**

	Shopping	Medical	Visit
Within Country	10%	3%	82%
Border	67%	19%	11%
Out of Country	3%	7%	80%

Three weighted variables were taken into consideration to arrive at each category. They are size of home by the number of bedrooms, education, accessories in the home – fridge, motor vehicle, bicycle, sewing machines, TV, etc. The most frequent was the low economic status at 51%, 38% middle, and high economic status 11%.

On the matter of the environment, the respondents mentioned that there were little or no recreation facilities. In response to the question on the type of facilities they would like to see in the future, 31% said some type of outdoor land resource, 31% said a gymnasium, and 26% said a facility that utilizes water would do.

People frequent the Central Market (55%), at least once a week (63%). They shop downtown (72%) at least three times a week. They get around Belize City by foot (69%). 67% travel to the border towns to shop while 82% and 80% respectively visit within the country and outside of the country frequently. See Table 4 below.

The areas highest in shopping at the border are Port Loyola 50% and Queen Square 50%.

Contrary to the general speculation that large numbers of people are receiving remittances from the U.S., only 36% said that they received monies on a regular

basis from the U.S. during the year of the survey. Mention was made that the youth (14-20) are the most unemployed according to 60% of the respondents. But in terms of generating jobs, however, the consensus was that Belizeans themselves rather than foreign investors should be involved. The respondents (68%) recognized that the desire to succeed is to work hard and that training (52%) in special skills was needed to improve oneself. A large number (66%) knew of some one who was self-employed because they had the necessary skills and financial assistance from family members.

Health problems facing most neighbourhoods were flooding, rats, mosquitoes, and baseboys. The latter were mentioned because of their practice of mentally harassing passers-by. There also existed some social problems – primarily neighbours quarrelling with each other. The respondents therefore saw the need for community participation (59%), to arrest these problems. However, only 17% want to be involved in the leadership of the community. Some 56% believe that the area representative should lead the group.

## Part Two

### Residence

Some 73% of the respondents were born in the Belize District. This showed some permanence. The areas with the highest frequency of Belize District born residents (75% to 92%) are as follows (see Table V): Dolphin St./Iguana St., 92%; Eyre St./Cork St., 83%; Avenues/East Collet, 78%; Plues St./George St., 75%; and Regent St./Foreshore, 75%.

The Vernon St./Lindo's Alley had the lowest frequency in this variable, 37%.

**Table V: Area by Belize City Born over 60%**

Area	Belize City %
Dolphin St./Iguana St.	92
Eyre St./Cork St.	83
Avenues/East Collet	78
Plues St./George St.	75
Regent St./Foreshore	75
East Collet/Avenue/ King St.	73
Victoria St./Castle St.	67
Neal Pen Rd./Supal St.	63
West Canal St./ Tigris St.	63
Bagdad St./Mosul St./ Vernon St.	63
King's Park/Landivar	62

However, this area had the highest frequency of persons born in the Stann Creek and Orange Walk Districts.

The most predominant ethnic groups were Creole, 70%; Mestizo, 16%; Garinagu, 6%; and Caucasian, 4% and Other, 4%. Table 6 below shows the predominant areas of residence in Belize City.

**Table VI: Area by Ethnicity**

Area	% Creole	% Mestizo	% Garifuna	% Caucasian	% Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	
Queen Street/Card Alley/Hydes Lane				15	
George St./Plues St.	1	10	5		
Bagdad St./Mosul St.	9	3	9		21
W. Collet/Tigris St.	8		9		7
Eyre St./ Fort St./ Cork St.	4	3	23		
Dean St./Wagner's Lane	5	13		31	7
Euphrates Ave./ Amara Ave.	4		9		14
Vernon St./ E. Collet Canal	8	10			
Pen Rd./Supal St.	9	10	9		7
Dolphin St/W. Collet	10	2	14		
Orange St.	8	7		21	
Cemetery Road	8	12	5		14
Baymen Ave./"C" St./ Landivar	8	5		15	7
Castle St.	5	15	9	23	
Rectory/Palm Ln.	9	8	9		
	6	2		15	

As is to be expected the Creoles reside all over the city. But they are most predominantly found in the Pen Rd/Plues St/ Castle St., Avenues, Pen Road and Vernon/East Collet areas. It is interesting to note that very few Creoles reside in the Queen St. and New Road areas. Similarly, the Mestizos are predominant in the Queen St., Eyre/Fort and Baymen Avenue with large clusters in West Canal/Orange Sts., Vernon/East Collet and the Avenues. As was shown earlier most of those residing in Vernon/East Collet were born in the Orange Walk District.

Most households enjoy stable marital

unions - married, 46%; common-law, 24%. Visiting unions were 21%.

More than half of the homes were rented, a total of 57%. Therefore 43% of the homes were owned. Three areas showed a heavy concentration of "owned" homes (over 50%), namely, Eyre St./Cork St., 78%; Regent St./Foreshore, 61%; and King's Park 55% (see Table 7). Also two areas show a substantial concentration of rented homes. These are West Canal St./Tigris, 90%; and Barrack Road/Queen St., 83%. The Queen St. area is a part of the business district of Belize City and also a part of the downtown. Hence, most

**Table VII: Area by % House Owned/Rented**

Area	% Owned	% Rented
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>57</b>
Queen St./Barrack Rd.	17	83
Plues St./George St.	43	57
Bagdad St./Mosul St.	35	65
Eyre St./Cork St./N. Park St.	78	22
Wagner's Ln./E. Canal St.	28	72
Avenues/E. Collet	39	62
Vernon St./Lindo's Alley	40	60
Pen Rd./Supal St.	43	57
Dolphin St./Iguana St.	48	52
Orange St./W. Collet	47	53
Cemetery Road	37	63
Baymen Ave./"C" St./Landivar	55	46
Victoria St./Castle St.	40	60
Regent St./Foreshore	61	39
W. Canal/Tigris St.	11	89

**Table VIII: Area by Plumbing**

Area	Yes	No
Queen St.	58	42
Rocky/Plues St.	25	75
Bagdad St./Mosul St.	38	62
W. Canal/Tigris St.	37	63
Eyre St./Fort St.	100	
Dean St./Wagner's Ln.	33	77
Avenues	37	63
Vernon St./E. Collet	40	60
Pen Rd./Supal St.	47	53
Dolphin Street	44	56
W. Canal/Orange St.	70	30
Cemetery Road	44	56
Baymen Ave.	96	4
Castle Street	70	30
Rectory	83	17

probably, buildings are rented out to generate income. But why is the Tigris St. a highly rented area?

The data also shows that homes are owned mainly by Belize City born residents (81%). The areas highest in lack of plumbing facilities were Bagdad St./Mosul St./Vernon St./West Canal/Tigris St. and East Canal/Avenues. The areas highest with plumbing facilities were King's Park, 96%; Foreshore/Regent St., 83%; and Eyre/Cork/North Park, 100%.

### Household Headship

Approximately 38% of the households were headed by women and 62% by men. Most of the women heading households (48%) were in visiting unions; 14% in a common-law relationship, 22% married but still claim to head households, and 22% were not in any union at the time of the survey. Most of the female-headed households (over 50%) were concentrated in the Bagdad/Mosul and West

**Table IX: % of Persons by Household Headship**

Headship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12-17
Male		58	51	68	71	62	70	60	63	71	64	54
Female	10	42	49	32	29	38	30	40	38	29	36	46

**Table X: Household Headship by Education**

Headship	% Primary School	% High School	% Tertiary
Male	49	39	12
Female	40	46	14

Canal/Tigris St. areas.

The table above shows that many women, alone, head large families of up to 17 persons. This is quite an undertaking.

Table IX indicates that more women who head households had a small advantage at the secondary and tertiary level of education, than men who head households. However, men at the primary school level have better skills than women of that same educational level. Does this also mean that women at a higher education level prefer to be single? What size households are they heading?

### Socio-Economic Status

Table XI below indicates socio-economic status by areas of residence.

The population is divided along socio-economic lines as follows: High, 12%; Middle, 40%; and Low, 48%. Two areas showed high economic status. These are Eyre/Fort and the Rectory Lane/Regent St/Palm Lane areas. These areas have shown tremendous stability earlier in that

they were highest among percentage of homes that are owned and also highest among residents that were born in Belize City and lived there most of their lives. Eyre/Fort and Baymen Ave/"C" St/Landivar St. were the middle socio-economic areas. The West Canal/Tigris St. and Dolphin/Iguana St./Raccoon St. are predominantly low - and none of the households show high socio-economic status. Other predominantly low economic areas are the Avenues, (Amara/Euphrates/Mex)Dean St. Wagner's Lane and Vernon St./East Collet. From this data one can deduce that the areas of residence are socially stratified as follows:

Rectory/Palm Lane/Foreshore - high to middle

Eyre/Fort St & Baymen/"C" St. - middle to high

Dean/Wagner's;Dolphin/Iguana; - low to middle

Avenues;W. Canal/Tigris; Barrack Rd. - low to middle

Grants Alley/Hydes Lane - low to middle

All other areas are mixed but predominantly skewed towards low. Other socio-economic indicators (See table XII) show that ownership of homes and plumbing facilities are significantly low among those of low economic status. A comparison of the variables, namely, plumbing, socio-economic status and home owned/rented shows that most of the households without plumbing (56%) were rented homes. These homes were

**Table XI: Socio-Economic Status by Area of Residence**

Area	% High	% Middle	% Low
Hydes Ln./Barrack Rd./Queen St./Grants Alley	7	33	60
Rocky/Plues	4	54	43
W. Canal/Tigris		42	58
Eyre St./Fort St.	37	56	7
Dean/Wagner's	6	33	61
Euphrates Ave	7	30	63
Vernon/E. Collet	10	37	53
Pen Rd./Supal St.	7	37	57
Dolphin		37	63
W. Canal/Orange	10	40	50
Cemetery	20	40	
Baymen Ave./"C" St./Landivar	17	57	26
Castle	7	43	50
Rectory/Palm Ln./Foreshore	53	15	
Bagdad/Mosul	8	24	68

primarily rented by women who headed households.

It is interesting to note that not one of the households with high socio-economic status group was in common-law union. Also in the low economic status each marital union category was just about equally represented. As is to be expected by now, the women in low socio-economic status are least in the highest education level, 3%; although nearly 33% made it to the high school level.

Of the women who bring in cash into the household (50%), some 77% are involved in full-time work, 9% hustle out of the home setting and 15% work part-time. More of the persons of low economic status worked out of the home than any other category. Household headship was also dominated by the male in all socio-economic categories except the low economic status.

I decided to look at ethnicity because of the glaring indicators in the socio-economic status by area of residence. The results showed that Mestizos and Caucasians were the least in the low socio-economic status (Table XII) at 35% and 30% respectively. These same groups showed most frequency in high/middle with 65% and 69% respectively. The two black groups, Creole and Garifuna were predominantly low to middle as a group. The Mestizos and the Caucasians as a group reside in the Eyre/Fort St. area which, as was mentioned earlier, had the highest frequency of high socio-economic status.

## Summary and Conclusion

Who are the residents of Belize City?  
What is the social profile of Belize City?

Belize City is made up primarily of four ethnic groups namely Creole, Mestizo, Garifuna and Caucasian. The Mestizo and the Caucasian as a group comprise the high to middle socio-economic group.

A little over 1/3, (38%), of the women interviewed head households. A large amount of this group look after large families. They rent small 1 - 2 bedroom homes, without adequate plumbing facilities and are mainly from the low socio-economic strata. Although indicators showed that there were more women who headed households at the tertiary education level, women who head households were still at a disadvantage in comparison to the men. The reason is that the majority had attained the primary and secondary school level only and therefore had lower marketable skills to show than their male counterparts.

A high proportion of people currently resident in Belize City were born there. Two areas with the highest frequency in this category are Eyre St./Cork St. and Dolphin St./Iguana St. areas. However, these two areas are respectively at the opposite high and low ends of the socio-economic pole. The residents are of different ethnicity namely Mestizo, Caucasian and Creole respectively. Why is this so?

Predominantly marital union status (married and common-law) is stable. At the low socio-economic strata neither marital union category showed a tremendous quantitative difference over the other. The average number of persons in a household is 6 and the average number of children in a household is 4.

Over 1/2 of the homes (57%) are rented. The most frequent in this category are Queen St./Barrack Rd./Grant's Alley and

**Table XII: Socio-Economic Status by**

(a)	% Home Owned/Rented		% by Plumbing	
	Owned	Rented	Yes	No
High	56	44	98	3
Middle	51	49	78	22
Low	37	63	28	72

  

(b)	By % Education		
	Primary School	High School	Post Sec./Univ.
High	17	37	46
Middle	29	55	16
Low	64	33	4

  

(c)	By % Marital Union Status		
	Marriage	Common-Law	Visiting Union
High	83	0	11
Middle	60	16	15
Low	26	34	28

  

(d)	By Household Leadership (As a % of Socio-Economic Status)	
	Male	Female
Total	62	38
High	72	23
Middle	72	28
Low	51	49

  

	By Household Leadership (As a % of Sex)	
	Male	Female
High	15	67
Middle	46	30
Low	39	63

(e) By Ethnicity					
Status	Creole	Mestizo	Garifuna	Caucasian	Maya/Kekchi
High	11	15	10	23	
Middle	38	50	33	46	100
Low	51	35	57	30	

  

By Women Who Bring In Cash				
Status	Full-time	Part-time	Home	Other
High	100			
Middle	84	1	5	1
Low	63	6	15	16

W. Canal/Tigris St. areas. Both are predominantly low socio-economic areas. The areas with the most frequency of homes that are owned are Regent St./Foreshore, a high socio economic area and Eyre St./Cork St./N. Park St., a middle socio-economic area. The latter area is considered "high land market" area so the residents probably hold onto their property. I am presently living and own property in the Queen St./Barrack Rd./Grant's Alley/Hydes Lane area and I have canvassed in the W. Canal/Tigris St. area. Therefore I am acquainted with both areas to make the following statement. The current owners are away and or living in "better" areas, for example, King's Park. Recently there has been some effort at "gentrification" of some parts of the former mainly Queen St., Barrack Rd. and Hydes Lane as an extension to the business district. Cards Alley and the other alleys off the main streets, generally, still remain the same - large families, no plumbing, rented homes.

The socio-economic status of the city is

mainly low to middle but skewed towards low. One area, Regent St./Foreshore shows all indicators of a high socio-economic area. The King's Park and the Eyre St./Cork St. areas are predominantly middle to high. Two areas are of the low socio-economic status. These are West Canal/Tigris St. and West Canal/Orange St. areas. The others are mixed, middle skewed towards low.

There is significant movement within the country to the border towns and out of the country. Respondents claim that they frequent the border primarily to shop. They make visits within Belize and away from Belize to see relatives and friends. Contrary to public opinion remittances from abroad are not coming into the City in large quantities. People stressed the desire to be trained in skilled labour to improve their economic well being. The need is most marked among women who head households, since their education level was at the primary and secondary level. The data showed that they were far less skilled than the men. Belize City residents

are still reluctant to lead in community level activities. They prefer to leave it to the politician/ authorities. Health authorities should take up this challenge to rid the city of the health problems indicated by leading community participation activities.

With all the leg traffic downtown coupled with the frequency of visits downtown primarily to shop, some enterprising person may want to look at turning a part of downtown into a mall with sitting and eating areas. Are we ready for this?

In concluding I would like to say that Belize City is fast becoming socially stratified by ethnicity. Whether this is by design or chance is worth discussing in this forum.