

Minimum Wages and Wages in Ozamiz City: Living Wages?

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ABSTRACT

Employees deserve to receive what is due him in the light of services rendered and should be the basis of the minimum wages. This study tried to determine if the minimum wages in Misamis Occidental is considered as living wages by using the comparative research method. The study found that the wages actually earned in the city as well as the minimum wage set by the government makes it very difficult for a family of five to attain a decent standard of living even with both parents working 7 days a week. It is recommended to review the minimum wage policy and closely monitor employers to comply even with the giving of the minimum wage.

Keywords

minimum wage, living wage, wages, compensation, standard of living, Philippines

Introduction

From the Scriptures we learn that a worker should be given his pay - (Good News Bible) or a worker deserves his wages (New International Version). Minimum wages create the negative connotation of paying a laborer a certain remuneration irrespective of his level of productivity (Lotriet, 1999). Many emotions are evoked when the concept of decency in paying wages is discussed. An employer may truthfully be sympathetic with the employees' needs, but the cold realities of the economic life will not persuade him to pay additional wages for the laborer to realize a modest but adequate standard of living.

In the negotiation for wages, honesty between parties should be observed. There should be transparency for all concerned and the ability to pay. In the laying down of wages, poverty and economic problem should not only be the basis. Considerations on productivity should not be neglected too. Every employee deserves to receive what is due him in the light of services rendered and should be the basis of the minimum wages.

Besides, minimum wages as an instrument in alleviating poverty does not reach its goal -the solution is found in uplifting people by educational processes so that in time they will be

able to look after themselves. The question of minimum wages as seen in the light of the Scriptures also entails recognizing the responsibilities which are implied by the calling in this field of labor.

Both the employer and the employee should take up their responsibilities as managers of the gifts of God. The employees should earn their wages, an achievement which can be measured in terms of marginal productivity. They should realize that as a production factor they should be productive and effective in production.

On the other hand, the employer should also realize that the employee should not be seen as a mere production factor. In the process of the labor market, person wages should also be introduced. Thus the minimum wages should be worthy of the wage-earner, and the wage-earner should be worthy of his minimum wages.

The study is exploratory in nature since there are no established rates regarding living wages that apply specifically in Ozamiz City. The standard of living in the area is not given nor studied and well documented. Thus, leading to the first research question of this study which is to determine how much is the estimated living wage in Ozamiz City. For purposes of this research, certain parameters are assumed in terms of the

individual working for the family. It is assumed that a micro unit of the society as averaged by the Philippine Statistics Authority is composed of a father and mother with two school children. For this study, it is assumed that the children are between the ages 4 years old to 15 years old. This age is considered as the basic education age and is not considered as eligible for work as defined by the Labor Code of the Philippines. It is also assumed that both the father and mother are working and is observing the normal work hours of 48 hours a week.

The only published rate in the area is the minimum wage to be observed in paying the employees which is effective November 1, 2018 which is P358.00 for non-agriculture and P346.00 for agriculture workers. This leads to the next research question of whether there is a favorable or unfavorable difference for the employees between the minimum and estimated living wage. The minimum wages are established to address that the rate is favorable both on the part of the employees and the employer. The rate is favorable for the employee if it meets the basic expenditures necessary for him/her and his/her family to attain a decent standard of living. On the part of the employer, the rate is favorable if he/she can still realize a marginal profit and receives a fair return in terms of efficiency from the employee being paid to do a business task for the attainment of the overall goals of the enterprise.

This discussion leads to the third research question which is whether the employers pay their employees what is a measure of the services rendered by the latter and not solely to take advantage of the lack of skills of the employees to find another or a better job.

Literature Review

Employees are not mere “human resources” or human capital (Vocations of a Business Leader, 2014), they are individuals that demands to be considered and treated as a person with dignity (John Paul II 1988 as cited by (Guitian, 2015). Employees engage in good work and earn a livelihood for themselves and their families. Consequently, work must be designed for the

capacities and qualities of human beings, and so we must not simply require that people adapt to their work as if they were machines. The Vocations of a Business Leader (2014) further states that:

“Good work gives scope for the intelligence and freedom of workers; it promotes social relationships and real collaboration; and it does not damage the health and physical well-being of the worker, let alone spiritual well-being and religious freedom. To arrange good work, leaders need to have the freedom, responsibility and ability to develop the right person in the right job. Good work is directed toward satisfying genuine human needs so that workers may provide for themselves and their families while also serving the flourishing of others. Good work must be sufficiently well-organized and managed to be productive so that the worker can indeed earn his or her living. Moreover, reward structures should make sure that those workers who do engage their labor in a sincere way also receive the necessary esteem and compensation from their companies.” (p. 15)

The living wage is the wage paid to semi-skilled and unskilled workers in a service economy and the basic – self-sufficient or unsubsidized – income required to provide for a family (Ciscel, 2000). In other words, a self-sufficiency income. This is the level of income necessary for a given family type to be independent of welfare or other public subsidies. On a study by Ciscel (2000), there are seven key consumer expenditures to measure a living wage of a typical family. These are the housing and utilities, child care, food, transportation, medical care insurance, clothing and personal care, and taxes. Thus, people working full-time should be able to provide a decent living for themselves and their family (Vickers, 2003).

These are reiterated by the Code of Ethics for Business formulated by the Bishops Business Conference for Human Dignity (1979). The specific provision for employees state that:

“Those responsible for business policy should consider not only the interest of the owners of the business, but also the interests of those affected by the activities of the business. Business

shall recognize the unique position of employees as individuals with a vital stake in their work and at the same time with inherent obligations to their own families, and provide for recognition that, although rates of pay may often be determined by union, economic and legal pressures, wages and salary policy should be based on the right of the employees to a fair and improving standard of living, irrespective of race, sex, age and creed.” (p. 2)

Republic Act No. 6727 otherwise known as the “Wage Rationalization Act” provides that it is the policy of the State to rationalize the fixing of minimum wages and to promote productivity-improvement and gain-sharing measures to ensure a decent standard of living for the workers and their families; to guarantee the rights of labor to its just share in the fruits of production; to enhance employment generation in the countryside through industry dispersal; and to allow business and industry reasonable returns on investment, expansion and growth.

It is further provided in the republic act that the regional minimum wages to be established by the Regional Board shall be as nearly adequate as is economically feasible to maintain the minimum standards of living necessary for the health, efficiency and general well-being of the employees within the framework of the national economic and social development program. In the determination of such regional minimum wages, the Regional Board shall, among other relevant factors, consider the following: (a) The demand for living wages; (b) Wage adjustment vis-à-vis the consumer price index; (c) The cost of living and changes or increases therein; (d) The needs of workers and their families; (e) The need to induce industries to invest in the countryside; (f) Improvements in standards of living; (g) The prevailing wage levels; (h) Fair return of the capital invested and capacity to pay of employers; (i) Effects on employment generation and family income; and (j) The equitable distribution of income and wealth along the imperatives of economic and social development.

Abueg, Sauler, & Teehankee (2014) adopted the view that the living wage is distinct from the minimum wage and allows an individual access to

opportunities that minimum wages may not. The wages of employees should be adequate to support a family and that society should be aware that the income transfer programs will lead to every family is able to benefit from the flow of wealth created in the economy (Ciscel, 2000).

There are different ways to look at the term adequacy to support a family. This is usually seen as being able to meet the material basic needs of a family. This means that the living wage concept is based in part on the concept of poverty and poverty line, since the latter is the most common measure of the minimum acceptable living standard (Anker, 2006). The list of family expenses contains no extravagances (Tiessen, 2015). This does not include the other aspects of basic living and human dignity such as leisure, community involvement, and security. It doesn’t allow families to save for their children’s post-secondary education; it doesn’t acknowledge that many working families also carry debt obligations. But it does recognize that things like rent, transportation, child care, food, clothing, internet, and laundry costs are part of the basics that every family strives to meet.

Many employers would argue that they cannot afford to give higher wages to employees on the premise of not sacrificing the bottom line of their businesses. They would always cling to the argument that they can’t afford to give more and hire more. Discussion on wages would always border on the trade-off of either hiring more with the wages they are willing to offer or hiring less with the demanded living wage to the employees. Though there is a growing and strong argument that private sector employers have much to gain by embracing the living wage movement and a good jobs strategy. Although public debate over a higher minimum wage is often subject to employer objections that the demands are too great, there is much evidence to suggest that the choice to pay low-paid workers higher wages is good for business, good for the community and, of course, good for workers (Tiessen, 2015).

In Tiessen’s (2015) study, the following important findings were derived: (1) Income is one of the most important determinants of health. Higher wages mean healthier employees and healthier

employees mean more productive workers; (2) Higher wages make it more desirable to work hard and retain a job; (3) Higher wages lead to reduced turnover, which means lower training and recruitment costs; (4) Workers earning higher wages are less stressed – they are able to focus more on work because they are no longer worried about putting food on the table and paying the rent; (5) Recognizing employees’ contribution to the company’s bottom line by compensating them with higher wages and other employee supports arguably enhances a business’ reputation among consumers.

These findings are consistent with the study of Abueg et al. (2014):

“When workers do work, they provide the firm or the supplier with some level of compliant effort, which is the minimum effort required to accomplish their tasks and can be viewed as the basic unit of labor as viewed in the basic theory of the firm. Workers also provide committed effort which is dependent on the benefits they receive from their employers.

This is to include the possibility of employers giving more to their employees than the living wage and receiving more from their employees in return.” (p.4)

Thus, the improvement of the quality of life of the employees leads to the benefits of the employers as well. It is therefore the aims of this study to determine whether the minimum wage in Ozamiz City is comparable to a living wage and whether the wages actually given by employers in the city compensates that of a living wage.

Methodology

The comparative research method (Esser, 2017) is used for this study. Description of the minimum wage and the desired living wage was derived and computed using defined parameters. Interview and research on published internet information were utilized to establish the parameters needed to determine the minimum wage and expense values needed to determine the living wage.

The minimum wage was derived from the Department of Labor and Employment division office in Ozamiz City. The living wage was

computed using actual values of the seven key consumer expenditures: housing and utilities, child care, food, transportation, medical care insurance, clothing and personal care, and taxes for a family of four living in Ozamiz City. Interview and secondary published materials were utilized to substantiate this information.

Actual wages were gathered through informal interview conducted to the skilled and non-skilled workers of Ozamiz City. Ten employees from different sectors of the industry were randomly interviewed to determine the daily wage they are earning. The daily wage earners were chosen since the minimum wage set in Misamis Occidental is set on a daily basis. Three establishment owners/managers were also interviewed to gain insights into the rationale of determining the amount of wages they pay to their laborers/employees. Secondary data were gathered through published information in the internet.

Data Analysis

Gathered data were tabulated and compared to determine whether the minimum wage in Ozamiz City is comparable to a living wage and whether the wages actually given by employers in the city compensates that of a living wage.

Results

The findings of the study are enumerated in the next succeeding paragraphs.

The following table summarizes the average cost of expenditures for an average size family of five living just outside the city limits based on interview and secondary data. The family of five is assumed to have young children averaged elementary school age.

Table 1. Summary of Average Family Expenditure

Expenditure	Cost
1. Housing and utilities	-P4,432.00 per month P3,500.00 per month rent (Based on a monthly rental of a two-bedroom apartment just

Expenditure	Cost
Child care	outside of the city) P282.00 water bill (Based on a minimum consumption of 10 cu.m. for one month given by the Prime Water)
	P650.00 electricity bill (Based on a consumption estimate given by the MOELCI II for an average household with the most minimal appliances of one television, a refrigerator and lighting provisions in the house)
	-P530.00 a month This rate is on the assumption that the two kids of the family go to a public school wherein the tuition is free and the amount is used for school supplies and projects, and snacks.
	P15.00 for biscuits/bread (P5.00 per bread for 3 children) per day thus, P15.00 multiply by 22 school days in a month is P330.00; and P200.00 average expenditure for supplies and projects per month
Food	-P7,116.00 per month This is from the Philippine Statistics Authority for 2018 for Misamis Occidental representing the provincial food threshold.
Transportation	-P2,520.00 a month This is based on the current public transport rate of P10.00 per person one way within one (1) kilometer radius of the city proper. There will only be two trips a day since the children and the parents would stay at their school and work places respectively for lunch breaks. Thus, P60.00 per day for the children commuting to school

Expenditure	Cost
	over 22 school days will total P880.00. And the father and mother commuting every day to the city proper would be P40.00 over 30 days in a month would total P1,200.00.
Medical care	- P 241.00 per month This data is gathered from the Philippine Statistics Authority for the second quarter of 2015 for Region 10.
Clothing and personal care	-P395.00 a month This is based on the data gathered from the Philippine Statistics Authority for the second quarter of 2015 for Region 10.
Taxes	This will be disregarded since the prices of the commodities in the Philippines are already tax inclusive and that minimum wage earners are exempted from paying the income tax.

The table shows that on the average the estimated family expenditure for a month that would afford a decent standard of living for the family in Ozamiz City is around P15,234.00. This amount is enough to cover the expenses enumerated in the table. It can be seen in the table that more than majority (76%) of the expenditure would go to housing and utilities (29%) and for food expenses (47%). The average food expenditure of a typical Filipino family for 2018 is around 41.5% of the total family expenditure (ABS-CBN, 2018) which supports the computation of the estimated total of what is considered as living wage in Ozamiz City.

Table 2. Wages paid to workers in Ozamiz City by establishments (selected at random)

Position	Wage per day	Establishment
Construction Helper (labor)	P175.00/day	Construction company rated A+ by the DPWH operating all

Position	Wage per day	Establishment
Carpenter/Mason	P290.00/day	over Region 10 with base in Ozamiz City Construction company rated A+ by the DPWH operating all over Region 10 with base in Ozamiz City
Farm worker doing all around chores in the farm	P150.00/day	University owning/operating a farm
Sales Lady	P130.00/day	Biggest Cellphone Retailer and General Merchandise Store
Administrative Staff	P250.00/day	Biggest Cellphone Retailer and General Merchandise Store
Store Assistant	P130.00/day	General Merchandise store in the Public Mall
Construction Helper (labor)	P180.00/day	Construction company rated A+ by the DPWH operating all over Region 10 owned by a local of Ozamiz City with base in Cagayan de Oro City.
Sales Lady/Bagger Boys	P130.00/day	Known department store owned by a Taiwanese

Position	Wage per day	Establishment
Sales Lady	P150.00/day	Stationery store operated in major cities in the Mindanao area
Glass House Laborer	P160.00/day	Local glass house

The table shows wage rates obtained from the different establishments in Ozamiz City. The table shows that a worker in Ozamiz City can be paid as low as P130.00 per day and as high as P290.00 a day. Based on the interview, the employees are resigned to the amount that they are receiving since this is better rather not having any work at all. Most of the interviewed employees are high school graduates and/or college level students who were not fortunate to be able to afford a college degree. Those that received more than P200.00 wage are skilled workers or college graduate that performs higher level of work in the establishments. Given these wages, these employees even have to work from Monday to Sunday on a 10-12 hours working period.

Table 3. Summary of reasons for giving of wages

University operating a farm	This is the going rate for the laborers that works in the farm. Other farms are offering the same if not lower than this rate.
Construction firm	We are offering the highest rate for laborers among all other construction firms in the city, the others are even paying less than we do.
Store owner in the public mall and the Biggest Cellphone Retailer and General Merchandise Store	We are only a small business; this is the best amount that we could offer. If we give more as wages, we will be the ones that will suffer for we have a very small margin from our sales. We could offer higher wages but it would

mean we have to increase our prices so that we could still earn for ourselves. But this would mean that we will not be competitive with our prices which could led to us losing our customers to our competitors.

Table 3 summarizes the reasons given by the employers'/management staff of the establishments interviewed regarding the giving of wages. These are some of the answers that were given as the reasons for the wages that the establishments give to their employees. The interviewed respondents are the same in saying that the wages they pay to their workers are enough since they have not reached a higher level in educational attainment. They are already better off that they are still hired the fact that they are high school graduates or college level only. Some of the owners'/management staff did not allow for an interview and some did not wish to justify the giving of wages to their employees.

Discussions

The estimated living wage is ₱15,234.00 in the city. This means that if there is only one adult working for the family, he/she needs to earn ₱507.80 per day and he/she needs to work 7 days a week without a rest day. This is very challenging on the physical aspect of the worker. Even in the Bible, when God created the world, He rested on the seventh day from His work. Thus, a worker who continually works without a rest day in order to earn a living wage for his/her family is bound to find himself/herself physically distressed. This could affect his/her performance in the workplace.

The earning of ₱507.80 per day is not even possible in the current system that is operating. The minimum wage in the city is only ₱358.00 and the employers are not even paying this amount. Thus, it is necessary for both the father and mother to find work and earn for the family. But for those who are not receiving even the

minimum wage due to lack of skills, training and educational attainment, it would still be very difficult to attain a decent standard of living for the family even with both parents working 7 days a week for the average wage is only about ₱130.00 to ₱150.00 a day per working adult.

The above computation for a living wage does not even cover for the following expenses which are inevitable in this lifetime: loan or other debt/interest payments; savings for retirement; owning a home; savings for children's future education; anything beyond minimal recreation, entertainment and holidays; costs of caring for a disabled, seriously ill, or elderly family member; or anything other than the smallest cushion for emergencies or hard times. Thus, a decent standard of living that is determined here is really bare of even the slightest luxury in life.

The employees are resigned to their faith with earning a meagre income from their current jobs. They are resigned to this fact due to their lack of skills and educational attainment that for them, this situation now is better than not having any work at all. This mediocrity in their life perception will also affect their level of output since they are not motivated to strive for more for they are in the belief that they are less in stature and there is nothing more that is going to happen in their life.

This perception is capitalized by the employers in the determination of wages to give to their workers. This is made the basis in the decision of how much to pay. They justify their actions on the premise that since others are not willing to pay more for the kind and level of workers available in the labor market, they are much better by offering the wages they have even if it violates in the first place the minimum wages set by the law. They are not willing to raise the wages higher for they already feel that they are just and fair since they offer higher than others.

The work performance of the workforce is greatly affected by the kind and quality of life they have within and outside of work. Efficiency and productivity will be affected when workers do not have time to rest and regain physical strength especially that their kind of work requires a lot of physical exertion in order to be productive. The

Labor Code of the Philippines even provides that a worker should be allowed a rest period of not less than twenty-four (24) consecutive hours after every six (6) consecutive normal work days.

Conclusion

Decent wages are a critical component of individual and family well-being. Higher wages mean a better standard of living for workers and their families. A living wage ensures that workers earn enough to meet the basic necessities of life and to participate in their community.

This does not rule out the possibility of using minimum wage hikes as a means to alleviate poverty, but does suggest that policymakers need to be smart as they implement it. A smart minimum wage proposal might exempt some entrepreneurs but should be strict in terms of compliance for those that are not.

Living wage employers are finding that higher wages lead to more productive employees, lower turnover, and increased employee morale (Tiessen, 2015). Thus, it is a challenge to local entrepreneurs to observe good practices in terms of giving wages to employees by giving what is due to them based on what they deserve as services are rendered. The wages given should foster the life of the workers and their families not the other way around. There should be living wages afforded to the services rendered by the workers in Ozamiz City in whatever sector of the industry they are in and not living wages that they exchange their life with trying to provide a decent standard of living for the family.

The study is only descriptive in nature. To advance the analysis, correlation may be done to test whether giving a better wage to employees

will lead to efficiency and productivity in their work to test the theory of Akerlof and Yellen (1990) in order to give a concrete picture to the entrepreneurs. This would help in the campaign for better living wages afforded to the employees not on the basis of their educational attainment but on the basis of their services rendered.

The following are recommended for action:

1. Policy makers should consider the possible effects of increasing minimum wages to allow for a better standard of living for an individual and his family and the impact on businesses in terms of hiring and retention of employees.
2. The implementation of the minimum wages should be closely monitored. The giving of living wages is discretionary on the part of the employers, but the observance of minimum wages is mandatory. Thus, all establishments that are not exempted by the Labor Code must give minimum wages and that the Department of Labor and Employment should prosecute those that do not follow. This should be strengthened since the government slogan is supposedly “The straight path to economic development (ang matuwid na daan patungo sa kaunlaran)”.
3. Strong information campaign should be initiated to spark a change in the mindset of entrepreneurs, especially a good number of them are products of Catholic educational institutions and majority are good patrons of civic and social welfare groups. The information should focus on being better because you are doing what is right and equitable and not on the premise that you are doing better because your bad practice is lesser in evil than the others.

illnesses, accidents, and death), and post-secondary education for children.

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Limitations and Future Studies

The study only included the crudest of necessities thus the decent standard of living referred here is the just above the poverty line. Thus, it is recommended for future studies to consider adding other factors to afford a better standard of living for a family of four like the provisions for modest vacations and recreational activities, contingencies and unforeseen events (e.i. serious

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