

ADULT LITERACY

Introduction

Literacy has been defined as “a particular capacity and mode of behaviour: the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential¹.” Therefore, ideally, assessment of literacy should be undertaken in such a way that would measure proficiencies along a continuum to determine the levels of competencies of the population.

Five adult literacy surveys have been carried out previously in Jamaica, the last being in 1999. The technological demands of the society determine the parameters of basic literacy and functional literacy and as such the content/construct of the surveys in Jamaica to date have focused on a lower level of attainment than would be found in more technologically advanced countries. Additionally, the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) is an instrument, developed by UNESCO, that is currently in use globally, which Jamaica will now utilize to provide internationally comparable literacy estimates and identify finely graded levels of competence. The literacy module in the JSLC 2008 was designed to facilitate comparability with previous estimates by utilizing the same test instrument and eligibility criteria that were employed in 1999. By linking the 2008 results with the LAMP results (which should shortly be conducted), assessment of national progress over the longer term will also be possible (see Appendix).

Individuals were considered literate if they were able “to associate simple words used in context, understand some prose and undertake a range of simple numeric tasks².” Functional literacy is defined as having competencies for reading, writing and calculation for personal and social development, while basic literacy is being able to read at a low level but requiring assistance in performing more complex tasks. The scores obtained were placed into one of three groups namely illiteracy, basic literacy and functional literacy. The chapter examines

¹ http://www.oecd.org/document/2/0,3343,en_2649_39263294_2670850_1_1_1_1,00.html

² JAMAL, *Jamaica Adult Literacy Survey*, 1999

literacy levels nationally, by age and sex of individual, by consumption quintile, and by educational level of individuals. Some analysis has also been done to get a profile of levels of literacy of the labour force and potential labour force. This was facilitated through a merging of the literacy survey and the Labour Force Survey.

Literacy Level by Age and Sex

A total of 4 745 individuals 15 years and older completed the literacy test. Of these, 91.7 per cent was Literate, with 78.3 per cent being Functionally Literate and 13.4 per cent having only Basic Literacy, while 8.3 per cent was Illiterate (Table 8.1). These findings suggest that over the period 1975-2008 there have been steady improvements in literacy levels with significant improvements in levels of literacy between 1999 and 2008³ (Table 8.2).

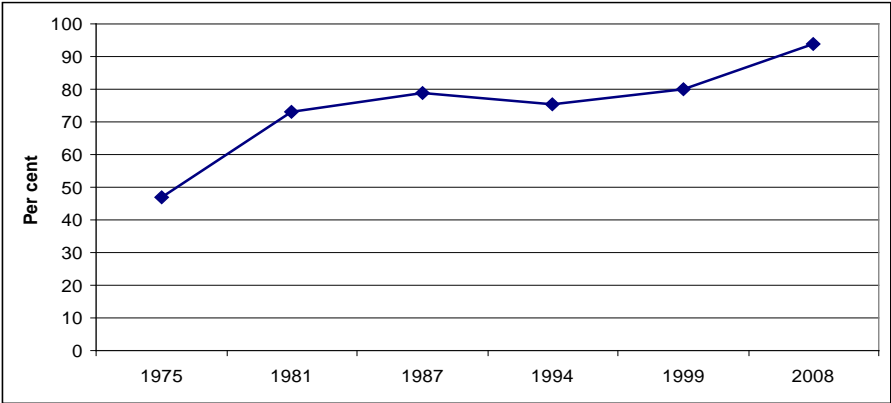


FIGURE 8.1: PERCENTAGE OF PERSONS WHO WERE LITERATE, 1975-2008

More males than females were illiterate, that is, 10.6 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively. However, males recorded greater improvements in Functional Literacy between 1999 and 2008, increasing 15.5 percentage points compared with a 10.6 percentage point increase for females (Figure 8.2).

³ JAMAL, *Jamaica Adult Literacy Survey 1999*

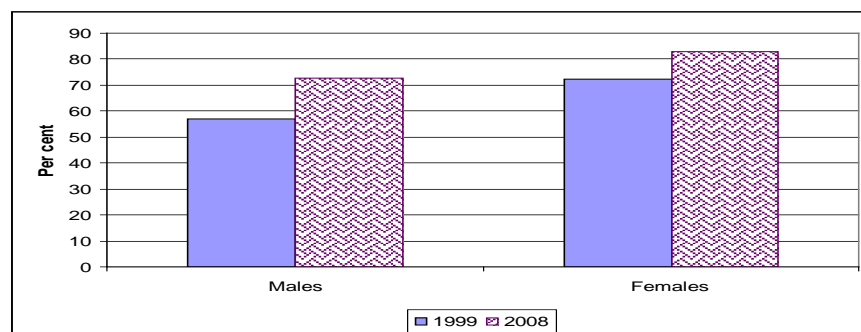


FIGURE 8.2: FUNCTIONAL LITERACY BY SEX, 1999 AND 2008

There was an inverse relationship between age and literacy, with literacy being almost universal (97.8 per cent) amongst adolescents 15 to 19 years and gradually decreasing thereafter (see Table 8.1). For all age groups up to 44 years, the level of literacy was above the national average, but decreased significantly thereafter.

TABLE 8.1: LITERACY LEVEL BY SEX AND AGE OF INDIVIDUALS 15 YEARS AND OVER, 2008

Characteristic	N	Level of Literacy			Total
		Illiterate	Basic	Functional	
Male	2 198	10.6	16.8	72.6	100.0
Female	2 547	6.5	10.7	82.8	100.0
15-19	583	2.1	4.9	92.9	100.0
20-24	477	2.7	7.1	90.3	100.0
25-29	480	4.4	13.7	81.9	100.0
30-34	488	8.2	11.5	80.3	100.0
35-39	497	5.0	12.5	82.4	100.0
40-44	451	7.6	11.8	80.6	100.0
45-49	423	9.3	15.9	74.7	100.0
50-54	316	14.3	17.8	67.8	100.0
55-59	254	14.6	18.6	66.8	100.0
60-64	215	18.2	21.2	60.6	100.0
65-69	201	9.3	16.0	74.7	100.0
70-74	135	21.5	22.8	55.7	100.0
75 and over	225	16.7	24.3	59.0	100.0
Jamaica	4 745	8.3	13.4	78.3	100.0

TABLE 8.2: LITERACY LEVEL BY SEX, AGE GROUP AND REGION, 1999 AND 2008

Characteristic	1999		2008		Total
	Illiterate ^a	Literate	Illiterate	Literate	
Male	25.9	74.1	10.6	89.4	100.0
Female	14.1	85.9	6.5	93.5	100.0
15-19	7.4	92.6	2.1	97.8	100.0
20-24	10.0	90.0	2.7	97.4	100.0
25-29	12.2	87.8	4.4	95.6	100.0
30-34	13.3	86.7	8.2	91.8	100.0
35-39	13.6	86.4	5.0	94.9	100.0
40-44	17.9	82.1	7.6	92.4	100.0
45-49	16.5	83.5	9.3	90.6	100.0
50-54	23.4	76.6	14.3	85.6	100.0
55-59	33.1	66.9	14.6	85.4	100.0
60-64	38.1	61.9	18.2	81.8	100.0
65-69	40.0	59.1	9.3	90.7	100.0
70-74	43.7	56.3	21.5	78.5	100.0
75 and over	54.8	45.3	16.7	83.3	100.0
KMA	11.9	88.1	6.3	93.8	100.0
Other Towns	16.0	84.0	6.7	93.3	100.0
Rural Areas	27.0	73.0	11.0	89.0	100.0
Jamaica	20.1	79.9	8.3	91.7	100.0

^a Region figures calculated

When compared with 1999, literacy levels improved for all age groups in 2008 (Figure 8.3). However, improvements were most marked in the older age groups, 55 years and older. At age 75 years and older, literacy levels were almost double what they were in 1999.

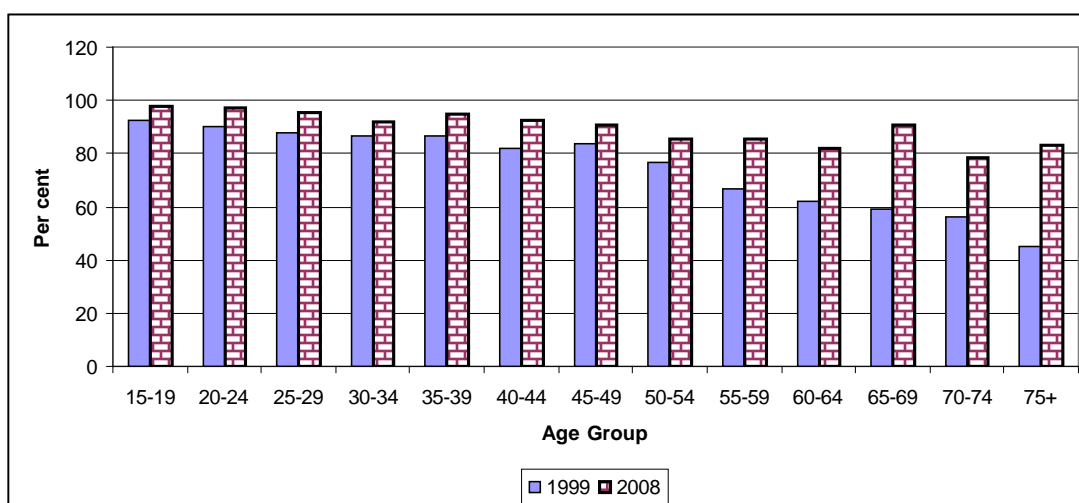


FIGURE 8.3: LITERACY LEVEL BY AGE GROUP, 1999 AND 2008

Literacy Level by Area of Residence

Literacy levels were highest in KMA and lowest in Rural Areas, that is, 93.8 per cent and 89.0 per cent respectively (Table 8.3). There was no difference in the percentage of those who were not literate in KMA and Other Towns, but the percentage of individuals with only Basic Literacy was somewhat higher in Other Towns, while the Functionally Literate was slightly lower.

TABLE 8.3: LITERACY LEVEL BY AREA OF RESIDENCE, 2008

Area of Residence	N	Level of Literacy			Total
		Illiterate	Basic	Functional	
KMA	1 549	6.3	11.8	82.0	100.0
Other Towns	933	6.7	14.0	79.3	100.0
Rural Areas	2 263	11.0	14.5	74.5	100.0
Jamaica	4 745	8.3	13.4	78.3	100.0

Figure 8.4 shows that while these differences were present in the three years, 1994, 1999 and 2008; they have narrowed over the period and were minimal in 2008.

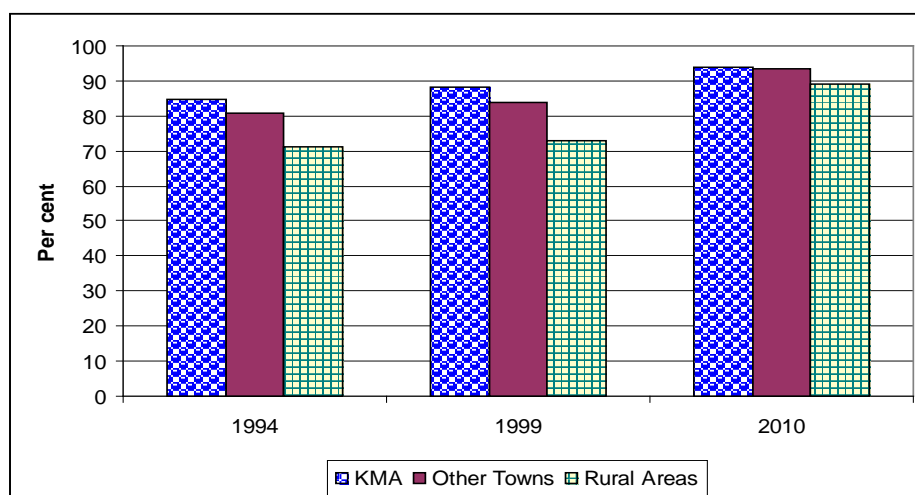


FIGURE 8.4: PERCENTAGE FUNCTIONALLY LITERATE BY AREA, 1994, 1999 AND 2010

Literacy Level by Consumption Quintile

Overall, the level of Literacy increased as consumption quintile increased (Table 8.4). Some 69.1 per cent of the poorest was functionally literate compared with 83.6 per cent of the wealthiest falling into that category. On the other hand, 12.2 per cent of the poorest was illiterate compared with 6.1 per cent of the wealthiest.

TABLE 8.4: LITERACY LEVELS BY CONSUMPTION QUINTILE, 2008

Consumption Quintile	N	Level of Literacy			Total
		Illiterate	Basic	Functional	
Poorest	595	12.2	18.7	69.1	100.0
2	683	9.1	17.9	72.9	100.0
3	877	6.9	15.1	78.0	100.0
4	1 041	10.6	12.1	77.3	100.0
Wealthiest	1 549	6.1	10.2	83.6	100.0
Jamaica	4 745	8.3	13.4	78.3	100.0

Literacy Level by Educational Levels

Fewer than 60.0 per cent of individuals with primary education or less were Functionally Literate, followed by those who had incomplete secondary education, 63.0 per cent (Table 8.5). As educational level increased, literacy level increased so that as would be expected, all

persons achieving a tertiary level of education had achieved Functional Literacy. Surprisingly, 3.2 per cent of persons with Secondary High/Technical education were classified as illiterate.

TABLE 8.5: LITERACY LEVEL BY LEVEL OF SCHOOLING, 2008

Highest Level of Schooling Attained	N	Level of Literacy			Total
		Illiterate	Basic	Functional	
Primary or less	531	18.5	22.7	58.8	100.0
Secondary grade 7-9	1 236	16.1	21.0	63.0	100.0
Comprehensive/New Secondary	594	6.1	11.7	82.2	100.0
Secondary High/Technical	1 875	3.2	9.9	86.8	100.0
Tertiary	464	-	-	100.0	100.0
Jamaica	4 700	8.3	13.3	78.5	100.0

When literacy level and level of schooling are further disaggregated by sex, the differences are quite marked (Table 8.6). For those whose highest educational attainment was primary, 26.0 per cent of males was illiterate, while only 39.6 per cent was Functionally Literate. For females, the corresponding figures were 13.7 per cent Illiteracy and 71.0 per cent Functional Literacy. The differences between males and females narrowed as level of schooling increased and at tertiary level there was no difference between the sexes.

TABLE 8.6: LITERACY LEVEL BY LEVEL OF SCHOOLING AND SEX OF INDIVIDUAL, 2008

	Males				Females			
	N	Illiterate	Basic	Functional	N	Illiterate	Basic	Functional
Primary or less	275	26.0	34.4	39.6	256	13.7	15.3	71.0
Secondary grade 7-9	639	17.6	23.7	58.7	597	14.5	18.1	67.4
Comprehensive/New Secondary	244	7.6	13.2	79.2	350	5.1	10.6	84.3
Secondary High/Technical	847	4.6	11.9	83.4	1 028	2.1	8.3	89.6
Tertiary	168	-	-	100.0	296	-	-	100.0
Jamaica	2 173	10.5	16.7	72.8	2 527	6.5	10.6	82.9

Literacy Level by Employment Categories

The unemployed had a Functional Literacy rate that was 3.9 percentage points higher than the employed, while illiteracy rates were statistically the same (Table 8.7). Persons classified as “Outside the Labour Force” include those who are “not looking for work, not available for work, do not want to work or are incapable of working”⁴. This group includes full-time students and persons who are retired. Their literacy rate was 92.1 per cent.

TABLE 8.7: LITERACY LEVEL BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS, 2008

Classification	N	Illiterate			Basic Literacy			Functional Literacy		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Employed	2 500	13.7	5.3	9.9	17.2	12.7	15.2	69.1	82.0	74.9
Unemployed	311	10.9	7.7	8.9	15.1	10.7	12.3	74.0	81.6	78.8
Outside the Labour Force	1 318	8.5	7.6	7.9	17.3	13.9	15.0	74.2	78.5	77.1

Sources: Compiled by the PIOJ from data supplied by STATIN, 2008; Labour Force Survey, 2008

Despite the fact that females had higher Functional Literacy rates in both the employed and unemployed categories, they represented 63.0 per cent of the unemployed and 44.7 per cent of employed respondents (Figure 8.5).

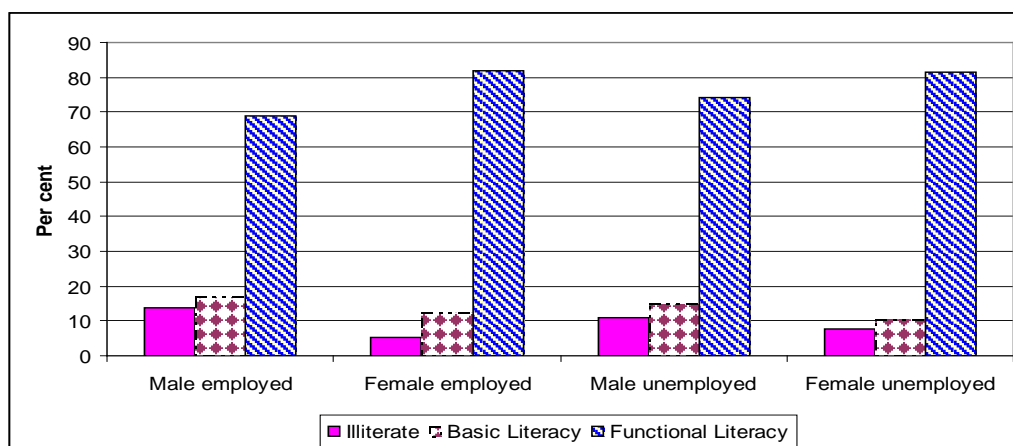


FIGURE 8.5: LITERACY LEVEL BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND SEX, 2008

⁴ “The Labour Force”, Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2005

There was a 93.7 per cent Literacy rate among Public Sector workers (Table 8.8); of the Literate, four in every 10 or 40.9 per cent was men. The sex distribution in the Private sector was somewhat different, with six in every 10 or 65.9 per cent of Literate workers being men. In the private sector overall, 92.1 per cent of workers were literate.

TABLE 8.8: LITERACY LEVELS IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, 2008

Classification	N	Illiterate			Basic Literacy			Functional Literacy		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Private Sector	1 109	11.0	4.1	8.0	14.5	12.0	13.4	74.6	83.9	78.7
Public Sector	303	12.1	2.7	6.4	8.6	6.3	7.2	79.3	91.0	86.5

Sources: Compiled by the PIOJ from data supplied by STATIN, 2008; Labour Force Survey, 2008

The group of Own Account Workers is wide and heterogeneous, ranging from persons with high educational attainments to the unschooled and includes Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs), artists and categories of consultants among many others. This accounts for the overall lower Literacy rate among Own Account Workers (86.2 per cent) compared with Employers (96.9 per cent). Among Own Account Workers the difference between the sexes at each Literacy level ranged from 5.7 percentage points at Basic Literacy to 14.7 percentage points at Functional Literacy, with women having higher literacy rates (Table 8.9). Males and females had similar Literacy rates among the Employer group.

TABLE 8.9: LITERACY LEVEL BY EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES, 2008

Classification	N	Illiterate			Basic Literacy			Functional Literacy		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Employer	60	2.7	3.8	3.2	11.2	14.8	12.7	86.1	81.4	84.2
Own Account Worker	996	17.3	8.4	13.8	22.1	16.4	19.9	60.5	75.2	66.3

Sources: Compiled by the PIOJ from data supplied by STATIN, 2008; Labour Force Survey, 2008

Literacy Level by Industry Group

Two industry groups: Agriculture and Electricity, Gas & Water had the two highest rates of illiteracy (21.2 per cent and 12.6 per cent, respectively) and Basic Literacy (22.7 per cent and 16.3 per cent, respectively) followed closely by Construction and Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotels & Restaurants (Table 8.10). While of the nine industries, the illiteracy rate for the Agriculture industry was also the highest in 1999 at 37.9 per cent, the illiteracy rate for Electricity, Gas and Water moved from ninth place with 5.0 per cent to second place in 2008. This was the only industry with a decline in literacy relative to 1999 (Figure 8.7).

TABLE 8.10: LITERACY RATE BY INDUSTRY AND SEX, 2008

Industry	N	Illiterate			Basic Literacy			Functional Literacy		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	548	22.8	15.8	21.2	23.1	21.3	22.7	54.2	62.9	56.1
Mining	115	9.2	0.0	4.0	14.1	12.4	13.1	76.7	87.7	82.9
Manufacturing	79	6.0	14.9	7.6	10.1	7.4	9.6	83.1	16.9	82.8
Electricity, Gas & Water	230	13.6	0.0	12.6	17.1	5.3	16.3	69.3	94.7	71.1
Construction	683	10.3	4.7	7.0	15.1	15.5	15.3	74.7	79.9	77.8
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	171	8.2	4.7	7.2	20.4	1.9	14.9	71.4	93.4	77.9
Transport, Storage & Communication	232	4.0	2.7	3.4	6.7	8.6	7.6	89.4	88.7	89.1
Financing, Insurance Real Estate & Business Services	191	10.5	2.7	4.6	10.4	6.7	7.6	79.2	90.7	87.8
Community, Social & Personal Services	251	12.0	5.2	6.9	17.5	12.7	13.9	70.5	82.1	79.2

Sources: Compiled by the PIOJ from data supplied by STATIN, 2008; Labour Force Survey, 2008

There was consistently a higher proportion of men who were illiterate within each industry. The only exception was the Manufacturing industry in which the proportion of women that were illiterate (14.9 per cent) was more than twice that of men (see Table 8.10).

The highest levels of Functional Literacy were in Transport, Storage & Communication and Financing, Insurance Real Estate & Business Services; the former being the only one with equal rates for both men and women (see Table 8.10).

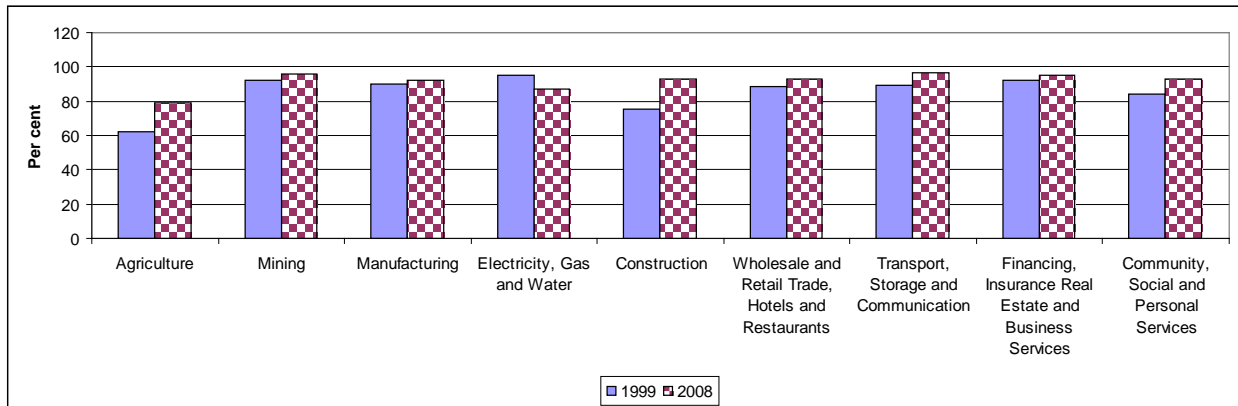


FIGURE 8.6: LITERACY BY INDUSTRY GROUP, 2008

Literacy Level by Occupation Group

There was a 74.9 per cent Functional Literacy rate among all occupational groups; 3.4 percentage points lower than the national average. Persons within occupational categories that predominantly require graduate and postgraduate qualifications exhibited very high levels of Functional Literacy ranging from 85.0 per cent to 94.8 per cent, as expected. The Literacy rate was the lowest among Skilled Agriculture and Fishery Workers at 79.9 per cent with only 56.3 per cent being Functionally Literate (Table 8.11). This ranking was the same 10 years ago, but there has been a 20.9 percentage point improvement in the Literacy rate.

TABLE 8.11: LITERACY LEVEL BY SELECTED^a OCCUPATIONS AND SEX, 2008

Occupation	N	Illiterate			Basic Literacy			Functional Literacy		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Service Workers	508	8.4	4.1	5.6	8.9	14.4	12.5	82.7	81.5	81.9
Skilled Agricultural and Fishery Workers	533	21.4	15.5	20.2	23.7	22.9	23.6	54.9	61.6	56.3
Craft and Related Trades	352	10.4	0.0	8.8	18.1	12.9	17.4	71.5	87.1	73.8
Plant and Machine Operators	120	10.3	0.0	9.5	21.1	0.0	19.4	68.6	100.0	71.1
Elementary	371	21.0	11.9	16.2	20.6	16.4	18.4	58.4	71.7	65.5

Discrepancies due to rounding

^aThe occupation groups that were omitted: Legislators, Senior Officials & Managers; Professionals; Technicians & Associate Professionals and Clerks are occupations that require a high level of Functional Literacy.

Sources: Compiled by the PIOJ from data supplied by STATIN, 2008; Labour Force Survey, 2008

Other skilled occupational groups also experienced increases in their Literacy rates consistent with the overall national increase, with the exception of Plant and Machine Operators. They had a 2.5 percentage point decline (Figure 8.7).

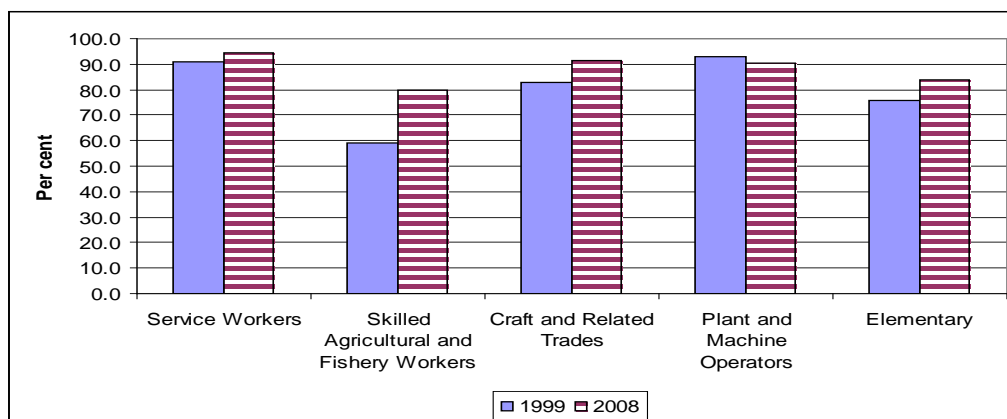


FIGURE 8.7: LITERACY BY SELECTED OCCUPATIONS, 1999 AND 2008

Conclusion

Nine in every 10 Jamaicans were Literate in 2008; reflecting an 11.8 percentage point improvement over 10 years. However, given the demands of today's society for diverse literacy skills such as computer literacy, the potential of those with only Basic Literacy to take advantage of these opportunities is low. Of concern, therefore, is the 13.4 per cent and 8.3 per cent who had Basic Literacy and was Illiterate, respectively. With two in every 10 Jamaicans not being able to read, write and compute at a satisfactory level, the country faces a challenge that has implications for its social as well as economic development.

Illiteracy in males was one-and-a-half times the proportion of that for females, with similar rates for Basic Literacy. This disparity by sex was most evident among those who had attained up to primary level education or less. This points to an urgent need to improve the literacy outcomes of boys as the existing performance has negative implications for their ability to advance to higher levels of educational attainment. It is interesting to note however, that this does not impact the employment rate of men; women, irrespective of high Literacy rates, have lower levels of employment and higher levels of unemployment.

An examination of persons in the labour force, especially in light of the growing concerns about improved productivity, is relevant. High levels of Functional Literacy were observed among persons 15-44 years, living in KMA and in the wealthiest quintile. There was however, a narrowing of the gap relative to comparable categories. Despite overall improvement in Literacy levels, Skilled Agriculture and Fishery Workers continue to lag behind. The importance of Agriculture in Jamaica cannot be overstated and so the industry must attract interventions to ensure improved outputs and sustainable agriculture business.