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EDITORIAL

Across the globe, violence against children is a reality and international media coverage of such incidences, starkly highlights the human tragedy that can result. Reading and listening to the reports is often unsettling. The violence can be found in homes, schools, children's homes, juvenile detention centres, and the streets. Violence touches the lives of thousands of children each year.

Right here in the tranquil Caribbean region, violence is also a growing problem for and among children, especially adolescents. A quick scan of media and other reports confirms this. **A five-month old baby dies from injuries to the head, sustained during a domestic dispute between his parents. An eleven-year old girl is lashed with a bamboo rod by a male teacher, and forced to receive medical attention at a hospital's emergency department. A school-boy fight turns deadly when one succumbs to stab wounds inflicted by his colleague. A school girl is brutally gang-raped by a series of men and left for dead in a deserted area.** Conversely, reports are also showing increasing trends in the number of adolescents who carry weapons to school or elsewhere, who belong to a gang, or who threaten or attack teachers.

So while the family and school are often portrayed as safe social spaces for children, a significant amount of the violence is taking place within their four walls. We know that this violence is caused by the way in which some persons learn to express their anger. We know that others may have character and personality factors that account for their abusive behaviour. We know that violence may be rooted in the traditional power relations between males and females; the rage caused by exclusion of varying kinds; through the absence of primary caregivers; mounting stresses caused by poverty and unemployment; or through cultural practices that are not protective or respectful of children.

Yet, as a social policy concern, the full realm of violence against children appears to exist only at a subliminal level of public consciousness - for most violence leaves no visible marks. Moreover, children and adults are often socialized into accepting acts of violence as justifiable and necessary chastisement - like corporal punishment. We want to ensure that our children are well-disciplined and ordered, but fail to consider the irony of using physical force to bring about a positive change in behaviour in children. We encourage the teaching of



Heather Stewart

non-violent, conflict resolution skills in schools, but fail ourselves to practice these skills and demonstrate to our children how these skills can and do work. We acknowledge that families need help, but have only offered parenting education, without the vital parenting support. We desire our young people to have respect for authority, yet we blatantly flaunt our arbitrary use of power.

This issue of Children in Focus explores the views and alternatives against corporal punishment in some of the countries in the region. While varying contributors offer their viewpoint on the subject, nothing they say

suggests that children should function in permissive environments. Where discipline is to be maintained, a clear set of behavioural boundaries and sanctions for overstepping those boundaries, is required. The use of appropriate sanctions must be used in evenhanded and just ways.

Internationally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) upholds children's right to protection from "all forms of physical and mental violence, while in the care of parents and others." Furthermore, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the highest authority for interpretation of the Convention, has consistently ruled that there is no compatibility between the Convention and the legal and social acceptance of corporal punishment of children. The Committee has admonished Caribbean and other governments to look to the positive examples of those countries whose explicit ban of corporal punishment, pre-dated the Convention.

As Caribbean countries must live up to the obligations enshrined in the Convention, the fact must be faced - corporal punishment is one of the existing social norms that illustrates a degree of tolerance for a form of violence against children. They must also face the fact that today's society cannot simply resign itself to management of the violence that crosses the legitimate line. Rather the aim must be to eradicate all forms of violence, against all people. This challenges the existing cultural practices that condone forms of violence against children, such as 'lashing', 'smacking', or 'spanking' - forms of violence that are no longer tolerated against adults. The region must seek to ensure equality of human rights for ALL of its citizens.

Heather Stewart
Project Officer, Child Rights
UNICEF Caribbean Area Office

LEAD STORY

CHILD ABUSE IN THE CARIBBEAN - DOES ANYONE CARE?

by Diana Mahabir-Wyatt

Akiel and "Shannon's"* Story

A little boy called Akiel was bugged by an adult male while at a school friend's birthday party. In Trinidad, it is not safe to allow children to travel by public transport to parties in upscale suburbs, so his aunt, with whom he lived, took him to the party in a taxi. When she went back to pick him up from the party to take him home, however, he could not be found. The next day his body was found in the swimming pool at the birthday house, where it had not been the night before, when the frantic aunt and other adults, including the Police, searched all over for the child. The autopsy showed that he was being bugged for quite some time by an adult. In fact, the autopsy had to be done twice since the aunt was dissatisfied with the results of the first autopsy, which determined that the child had died from drowning, and never mentioned sexual abuse. When the second autopsy showed the extent of the sexual abuse, and the paucity of fluid in the child's lungs, questions started to be asked. The newspaper reports of the inquest were graphic and terrifying. Buggery of a small child stretches the muscles of the anus to an extent that can so damage the muscle that the child may be unable to control his passage of faeces. To speculate on how painful that must be for a little boy is useless once the child is dead. But someone, obviously, did not care.

Another child, in South Trinidad, was brutally raped the following week. She was twelve years old, and was badly damaged in the process. Her mother, who is only twenty-six herself, has seven children to support, the rape victim being the oldest, and who bore the brunt of the frequent beatings that the mother dishes out to all seven of them. The child has not menstruated since the rape, and has yet to be tested for either AIDS or pregnancy. When the rape was reported to the Police Station, the Woman Constable on duty refused to take the report because, she said, she couldn't take a report from a child, although the mother was there. Eventually, a child rights activist from the YMCA intervened, and the Police Officer reluctantly took the report. There was never any news report on the incident. There rarely are reports of rape of girl children that age. There are too many for them to be 'news'.

Most are not even reported to the Police, unless, as in this case, the mother hopes to get help for the medical expenses. No one cares enough.

Child Abuse is Prevalent in Caribbean Communities

There have been numerous instances of children being beaten by irate parents, step-parents and other family members to "correct" their behaviour, when they have not controlled their bowels, when they have eaten something not meant for them, when they did not hear or obey an order fast enough, or when some *shannon assigned task was not done to the satisfaction of the adult. Some of these children have died as a result of the beatings. Others have been left deaf, partially blinded, with twisted and broken

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All children have the right to be protected from any form of harm and violence

limbs, and with permanent mental damage where the blows hit the head. Often, when the child is taken to the hospital, (and this is not always possible) the batterer is present, and the damage to the small body is reported as having been caused by "a fall". It happens every day and social workers available to investigate and do something about these children—at risk and others in their families just do not exist.

Professionals Seem Reluctant to Report Incidences

What are Caribbean Governments doing about child abuse in the Caribbean?

The cases above are common enough in all the Caribbean territories. In the hospitals, government doctors refuse to report such cases as child abuse, even where the law makes it mandatory, because it will mean tying up their time in Court. Precious time which they feel is better used to get someone else well, rather than in sitting around waiting for a case to be called which - often as not - is postponed because one or other of the lawyers is not ready to proceed.

The doctor who performed the first autopsy on little Akiel, who didn't comment on sexual abuse in his findings, was a government employee. The policewoman who refused to take the report in the case of the child rape victim was also a government employee. It is doubtful in the extreme that either of them will be disciplined for negligence.

There is no child-centeredness to government and judicial policies or procedures in the Caribbean. Other things, like fighting crimes against property such as robbery and fraud, and co-operating with the Americans in the war against drugs take precedence. Governments provide little or no support for single mothers frantic with worry and panicked over the thought of having to support far too many children. None of the Caribbean Governments pays out family allowances, as happens in the developed countries, so that at least minimum conditions of food and clothing can be provided for the most disadvantaged of children.

And children growing up in these circumstances are not valued. They are burdens to be kicked around, frequently running away to live on the streets, turning to a life of rough usage and exploitation by criminals, and then into criminal action of their own. Although there are government-supported orphanages, most of the shelters for abandoned children are run, often poorly, by cash-strapped NGOs, frequently with no government help at all.

Very little - if anything - has been done in most countries to change the tradition of violent punishment of children...

All Caribbean Governments have policies for social development, through which they express concern about the needs of children. Legislation is in place, in all

Caribbean territories, prohibiting the sexual exploitation of minors, violence against and neglect of children, and providing for compulsory education. In all Caribbean countries there is provision for the registration of children at birth, the first step towards establishing citizenship rights. Most of the major provisions in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are covered in some form by legislation. Unfortunately, few, if any of the Caribbean countries studied have allocated the resources necessary for the implementation of the legislation and the policies that arise from them. In particular, very little - if anything - has been done in most countries to change the tradition of violent punishment of children by their caregivers at home and at school.

There has been little public education other than that given by the few religious bodies that promote the words of Christ: "Suffer the little children and forbid them not...". Most beaters of children quote King Solomon: "Spare the rod and spoil the child" although the Bible tells us that Solomon had 300 wives and 600 concubines and countless children, became a worshipper of a local desert god who demanded the blood sacrifice of babies as part of his worship, and that his own sons turned out to be cruel and despotic leaders. Hardly a role model on how to bring up children!

Corporal punishment in schools is often carried out in extreme forms, and there has been little effort by any of the Caribbean Governments, to

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change this, even in instances where educational policies state otherwise. Internet searches indicate that Trinidad & Tobago is the only country in the English-speaking Caribbean, where the law clearly and expressly forbids corporal punishment in schools.

People literally do not know that corporal punishment is harmful to the development of children's brains.

At any rate in Trinidad, beatings continue to take place in schools, particularly in privately-run and non-supervised pre-schools and primary schools. Partly this is because teachers in these schools are often themselves untrained in classroom management and non-punitive discipline, and also because there has been no public education generally on the impairment effects corporal punishment has on the neurological development of children. People literally do not know that corporal punishment is harmful to the development of children's brains, and the often repeated justifying statement: "I was beaten

as a child and look at me! It didn't do me any harm!" testifies how lack of self-knowledge combined with no understanding of child development leads to self-delusion. Worse than that, as statistics of violent crime in the region show, it steadily escalates the levels of violence that those who were beaten as children, exhibit as adults.

What Needs to be Done

There is a need to be pro-active in trying to save the children of the region from child abuse, which is often tied into poverty cycles. Independent research on the long-term social and economic effects of domestic violence and child abuse in the Caribbean should be commissioned by the governments of the region. There should be public education programmes, including parenting education, in all secondary schools in the region citing the dangers of corporal punishment, and teaching skills in non-punitive discipline and stages of child development should be two priorities.

More human resources must be put into the implementation of existing legislative and policy measures intended to protect

children at risk, and the operation of institutions established for care and shelter of children at risk must be closely monitored. Greater collaboration with international agencies such as UNICEF, Raada Barnen, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the UN Monitoring Committee for the International Convention for the Rights of the Child should be sought.

There are numerous international agencies set up for the protection of the rights of all categories of human beings in all parts of the world, and less than a dozen set up to protect the rights of children. So that the phenomenon of not granting priority to the needs of children is not one limited to the Caribbean, but it is one the Caribbean needs to focus on for its own protection and that of the future of its societies. ■

Ms. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt is Chair of the Trinidad & Tobago Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and an Executive Committee Member of the Trinidad & Tobago Coalition on the Rights of the Child.



UP CLOSE...



Hon. Senator Hazel Manning

Hon. Senator Hazel Manning is Trinidad & Tobago's Minister of Education, a position she has held for the last two years. In this position she is able to utilise her skills and acquired techniques to streamline and improve the standard of education, both aesthetically and scholastically. A Social Scientist by calling, she obtained a B.Sc. in Social Science from the University of the West Indies (St. Augustine) in 1972, followed by a Post-Graduate Diploma in Public Administration from the same university in 1987. Senator Manning has offered her services in the study of social development for 29 years, and has conducted numerous social research projects leading to the design of social policies and the implementation of social works. Mrs. Manning has held a number of related positions before becoming a Specialist Consultant in 1997. Among them are Business Development Manager at the Airports Authority, Head of the Research Unit of the Ministry of Planning and Development, Manager of the Social Affairs Unit of the National Housing Authority, and Research Officer in the Ministry of Finance and Planning. She is the Founder and Chairperson of the Self Esteem Foundation of Trinidad & Tobago.

Q: Would you say that issue of flogging children is seen as a cultural norm in Trinidad and Tobago?

A: It was a norm, as it might have been worldwide at different times. However, we are witnessing a transition in values regarding punishment within our society. It is important to recognise this. The exposure both children and adults have to the outside world, has never been as much as it is today - it may be said that societal values are becoming more universal and generally there is a tendency towards a gentler, more developmental and more humane. At the same time, the concepts of interdependence, mutual co-operation and respect for each other are now well imbedded in educational thought. Led in particular by universal organizations and the more developed nations, a heightened awareness of children's rights and avoidance of violence and abuse of children have influenced legislation in developing countries such as ours. The net effect of all of this has trickled down in no uncertain terms to classrooms and homes. As a result, even those parents who still practice flogging in the homes are now showing signs of reflecting on

the issue. Flogging in schools no longer has the universal support from parents it might have had in the past.

Q: Why did the Government of Trinidad and Tobago adopt the policy of abolishing corporal punishment in schools?

A: Actually, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has never abolished corporal punishment. The judicial system still uses corporal punishment and the Children's Ordinance, an old piece of legislation that is still current in law, still speaks of punishment that is 'reasonable' for children. The Education Act of 1966 is silent on the issue of the use of physical punishment of students in schools. The question is really the interpretation and meaning that people put to the word 'punishment'.

This must also be seen in the light of the more modern developmental approach that is taken by universal organizations such as the United Nations, which seek to guarantee common rights for all children. Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to these 'Conventions' - as they are called. Although there is a package

of new legislation, measures and institutions that will address the mismatch of our current laws with these universal conventions, they have not yet been proclaimed as law.

Thus the notion of litigation and where schools stand in the eyes of the law regarding corporal punishment is of paramount concern. The corporal punishment once used as an integral part of teaching in the past could now be interpreted as assault. In this period of transition in a societal sense, educators would arguably prefer to be on the cutting edge of their professional development seeking alternative approaches to student learning.

Q: What alternatives to corporal punishment have been implemented in schools?

A: With all that we know now of how children learn and how important it is for countries to develop their human resources properly, the Ministry has taken a modern approach to learning. Its approach is to develop modern curricula, assessment and teacher-education methods based on a

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developmental approach. This kind of approach embraces current constructivist techniques, which recognize the importance of proper socialization, relevance and meaningfulness in the things we teach. Further, our modern methods embrace the concepts of project work and cooperative or team efforts, which mirror work in the real world.

With these methods, students develop at their own pace and in their own ways, constructing individualised knowledge and developing their own brand of creativity. In short, our structures are becoming less regimented and the knowledge that we promote in schools is becoming less prescriptive and of greater interest to the child. Schools are becoming more child-centred. In such a mode, encouragement and understanding become of greater importance than punishment in the learning process.

Q: How effective have been these measures in instilling discipline among the students?

A: In a modern developmental approach, the discipline that is inculcated is the discipline of cooperation, mutual respect for the rights of individuals, creativity and persistence in discovery and construction of knowledge. It is the discipline that children learn from pursuing the development of their talents in a real world environment with real world disciplines of

learning. Curiously, in the new dispensation, competition will eventually give way to cooperativeness - this, of course, has not yet been achieved. It is not necessarily the discipline that emerges from fear of physical punishment or working with terror or abuse as the motivator.

Q: How did Trinidad and Tobago effect the change? Based on this experience, would you recommend a similar or different implementation strategy to other Caribbean Governments and why?

A: The improvement in our education system in the post-colonial era, started since the 1960s. Thanks to an enduring commitment to improvement, we are starting to see the changes of which visionaries of the past conceived. It has been, and will continue to be, steady and complicated work. Some might argue that some of our Caribbean counterparts have gone ahead of us in completing the modernisation of their systems.

Q: In what other ways has the Government of Trinidad and Tobago been trying to curb the increasing trends in societal violence?

A: What can be said from the Ministry of Education's standpoint is that we have had to address the fact that runaway elements of the society have become more violent and criminal in nature. This is

impacting on the school system in a negative manner. Our School Intervention Strategies Programmes have been specifically designed to address this issue trying to contain such influences so that significant degradation of the system's quality does not take place. Some divisions of the Ministry such as School Supervision, Curriculum Development and the Central Guidance Unit have been particularly preoccupied with coping with the impact of these radical social elements on the system. In this regard, the Ministry of Education is about to institutionalise a Student Support Services Unit that would be holistic in its approach to develop social, psychosocial, emotional and spiritual well-being among other factors.

It might be worth the while to point out that generally, parents are more conscious now of the importance of schooling and the importance of maintaining quality in the system. The school system is doing comparably well and the quality of our results at important examinations is improving. However, there is still a long way to go in the journey towards total school improvement. ■

Responses were developed in consultation with Mr. Joseph Ragoonanan, Senior Guidance Officer II, and the Ministry's representative Human Rights Consultative Committee of the Attorney General.



VOICES OF CHILDREN

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, states that States have an obligation to protect children from all forms of violence.

Children who toured the UNICEF/CAO Information Centre during this school term, were asked to describe in their own words what they thought constitute violence against children and how they thought it could be stopped or prevented. Below are some of the responses from a group of Class 3 students of the People's Cathedral Primary School in Barbados:

Violence against children is abusing them. Making them work where they will get harmed. I think it should be stopped. For example, parents should not beat children because they're angry, and they should not make them use a saw to cut wood. I think we should put a law that states that we should not beat children. Don't forget, children have rights.

Arielle Pilgrim, age 10

Child abuse must be stopped. By letting children stay near to their mothers and fathers so that if someone came and took their children, they can tell the police. Parents shouldn't let children do work that is not good for them.

Tiffany Bynoe, age 10

Child abuse must be stopped. Children are being hurt, injured and cursed. This must be stopped by going to church and learning about God and His ways. The adults who are doing these things will be like God as long as they go to church and read the bible. A child shouldn't have to go on top the house and paint it. It is too dangerous. They might fall off and get severely hurt. Parents should be smart and protect their children.

Misha Walker, age 9



Students from the People's Cathedral Primary School, Barbados, whose views on "Violence against children" are reflected below

*front Row l-r
Jonathan Gamble, Tiffany Bynoe,
Arielle Pilgrim, Shareece Clarke,
backrow l-r
Warren Sayers, tatyana Atkins,
Janelle sealy, Gabrielle Elcock.*



Class three students from the People Cathedral Primary with their teacher, Mr. Miller. During their visit to the Information Centre, all students shared their thoughts on the topic of Violence against children with the UNICEF programme staff.

Violence against children is child abuse. It can be stopped by just explaining your feelings to your parents. Let them know how you feel.

Tatyana Atkins, age 9

Violence against children is abuse. It can be stopped by letting the child tell other people so that they can do something about it.

Janelle Sealy, age 9

Violence against children is child abuse. Child abuse can be stopped by talking it out and not shouting.

Warren Sayers, age 8

Violence against children is when parents lash them mercilessly. I think you can stop it by telling the children "you're grounded" so they wouldn't get lashes.

Jonathan Gamble, age 9

I think abuse against children is making them do work that parents are supposed to do like cleaning the house, washing the car by themselves, lashing them, making them stay at home by themselves, not letting them have friends, and not letting them go to movies with friends and family. ■

Gabrielle Elcock, age 10

THE EFFECTS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

by Marilyn Atherley

I recently attended a conference on research in child development. One symposium at the conference has made me think even more about the issue of corporal punishment and its effects on children. This particular symposium was entitled: "Physical Discipline and Children's Development: A Cross-cultural Perspective". Listening to the research papers presented and the discussion that followed led to some thoughts of my own.

Research and discussions on the issue of corporal punishment and its effects on children seem to be focused mostly on some of the effects of corporal punishment. Emphasis has been on effects associated with aggressive and/or disruptive behaviour, anxiety disorders and to some extent academic performance. But I question the other effects of corporal punishment and the need to study those also. We need to examine other issues such as what the victim of corporal punishment is internalising, that is, how does she feel about herself? What is his level of happiness or joy with life? What about her self-confidence or sense of empowerment?

Not doing well in school is sometimes accepted as one of the consequences of the emotional effects of corporal punishment. But most times, only extremely poor academic performance is recognised as related to physical punishment. We forget that even the threat of such punishment can have

the same emotional effects. What then is the acceptable level of academic performance that concludes that the effect of corporal punishment is not significant? If a child is doing reasonably well, do we take that as a sign that the child is "benefiting" from the punishment or at least not being affected by it? Are we sure that the child has reached his full potential? Or is he capable of doing even more and better if the fear and physical and emotional hurt were not there?

The effects of corporal punishment are long-term. They can in fact affect the victim for the rest of his life.

The effects of corporal punishment are usually measured in children elementary school and perhaps the first few years of secondary school. In other words, we are only studying the short-term effects of corporal punishment. The effects of corporal punishment are long-term. They can in fact affect the victim for the rest of his life. We need to study the effects, both direct and indirect, of corporal punishment on the adult's life.

A child who is physically punished internalises a deep emotional hurt along with the physical pain. The emotional pain

includes disappointment (this was someone the child was depending on to love him unconditionally and teach him about loving and caring), loss of sense of safety, fear of adults, confusion about what has happened and why it has happened, feeling unworthy and insecure.

This emotional pain is stored in the nervous system along with the memories of the experience, since most times following the physical punishment the child is not given the opportunity and support to work through these painful emotions accompanying the physical punishment. We know now a lot about how these stored painful emotions block our intelligence and good thinking and cause us to react inappropriately in even unrelated circumstances. We know how these emotions can act as triggers to inappropriate behaviour for as long as they remain unresolved and stored.

We often see adults who are unable to cope with life; who have difficulty building and maintaining good relationship; who are trying to develop and maintain a career; they are not fully developing and using their talents and skills, but settling for less than their full potential. These may all be results of emotional blocks resulting from the unresolved effects of physical punishment in early childhood.

Because most adults look like they are doing well, we are fooled into thinking that we have not been

OPINION

affected by that early hurt, or that we have managed to get over it. We are in fact only surviving and doing so by using a huge amount of attention and energy which could be put to better use to make our lives more enjoyable and fulfilling. It could possibly be that our level of accep-

tance of how life could be is too low. We do not take into account the maximum potential that we as human beings really could reach if those hurts were not limiting us.

When parenting gets difficult for us and we feel as if we have nothing

else to resort to but physical punishment, we must try to remember that our actions today have effects on our children. We may not be able to detect that effect right then. But the hurts that they are exposed to now, can re-emerge as obstacles to a full and satisfying adult life. ■

*The preceding article was reprinted with permission by the author. It first appeared at www.suite101.com and was excerpted from a Trinidad & Tobago newsletter entitled *Parenting Support* (Issue No. 28 April – June 2003). Marilyn Atherley is an Educational Psychologist, Freelance Writer and Counsellor born and raised in the Caribbean. As a Consultant she travels around the globe training and learning from parents, educators and young people. This, coupled with her parenting experiences for the past twenty-one years, have provided her with invaluable insights into human behaviour and learning. She has chosen writing as one of the vehicles for sharing these insights and expertise with others. Some of her work can be seen at http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/social_emotional_learning, www.ajoyfulplace.com, www.counseling.org, www.momsvoice.com. She is the author of 'Students Really Want to Learn - A Counselling Guide for Teachers', 'Helping Your Child Through School', and 'A Joyful Place Called School'. She can be contacted at The Study Centre in Trinidad. Tel: (868) 645-6296, or Tobago, Tel: (868) 660-7476, or email joyfulplace@yahoo.com.*



CONCERN OVER BEATING IN SCHOOLS IN BARBADOS

by Peter W. Wickham

A report that appeared in the Daily Nation sometime ago that an eight-year-old student had been “bruised” while being flogged at school, should send a clear signal to authorities that this matter of flogging is in need of urgent attention. While this report and the tumultuous discussion that it provoked centered around the alleged use of “excessive” force, it points to a much larger issue that successive governments in Barbados have chosen not to address.

This is virtual absence of any clear policy regarding beating in schools, including the conditions under which flogging is appropriate, the way such punishment is to be administered, who is responsible for administering such punishment and with what. Such regulations would seem so vital that it would surprise many Barbadians that the Ministry of Education is at this time unable to produce such a policy document. Moreover, it would further appear that several school Principals (past and present) and teachers cannot recall ever seeing such a document that could guide them in administering such a punishment.

Efforts to identify and critique such a policy document led this author to check with the Ministry of Education, select school principals and past principals, teachers and parents. Interestingly, none of these people can recall ever seeing a clear explicit policy in black and white that

establishes rules for flogging. Based on the verbal pronouncements of the Ministry it would appear that the Ministry condones flogging with “moderate” force in circumstances that appear appropriate to the Principal. Notwithstanding, the Ministry cannot provide a parent or interested member of the public with a document that gives explicit instructions. Moreover, it cannot be disputed that this broad rule is often varied to allow junior teachers to administer floggings in the interest of “instant justice”.

Evidence of some amount of regulation was provided by the one past primary school principal the beloved Miss Daphne Maxwell, herself a believer in the efficacy of the whip. It was apparently the custom for some time to record incidences of behaviour that led to flogging, in a notorious “Black Book” which would be made available for frequent inspection by the ministry. Regrettably this practice seems to also have fallen by the wayside.

Against this background it should therefore not surprise anyone that the incident that gave rise to that report occurred, or is likely to occur again. As with most other matters our policy makers seem satisfied to be “reactive” instead of “proactive”, hence we can expect to wait until one of our nation’s children is severely injured by an overstressed school-teacher, before some policy is developed to address flogging.

Indeed, flogging in schools shares several characteristics with the death penalty and the flogging of criminals, where the public is vocal to the point of fanaticism and divergence of opinion is often greeted with hostility.

It is possible that government’s hesitance to articulate any clear policy and guidelines that could be scrutinised is due to the tremendous public debate that this issue is likely to evoke. Indeed, flogging in schools shares several characteristics with the death penalty and the flogging of criminals, where the public is vocal to the point of fanaticism and divergence of opinion is often greeted with hostility. High levels of public support for both of these punishments have already been recorded in Nation/CADRES polls. This is no doubt part of the reason why this practice has not yet been banned altogether, as has been done in several other countries.

Flogging Children – Hypocritical?

Persons supporting the continuance of flogging should, however,

[...cont’d on next page](#)

consider the inherent hypocrisy of beating a child, while emphasising the impropriety of the same child using violence against another human being. This is an issue that continues to perplex several parents from all generations. Nonetheless, supporters can be expected to defend themselves by the often “unscientific” reference to the adage that you “spare the rod and spoil the child”. This of course conveniently ignores the fact that this current generation that is often referred to as lost, was weaned on the whip.

Regardless of which side of the argument one takes, there is unlikely to be much opposition to the

suggestion that flogging in schools is in urgent need of examination and regulation. Parents cannot help but be concerned that currently they take their children to school each day and essentially surrender them to the absolute discretion of Principals who would no doubt have different opinions of what constitutes “moderate force”. Worse still is the fact that some of these Principals have been known to “delegate” the power to flog in the interest of the teacher being able to react swiftly to situations that require punishment. A practice that inherently exposes the child to the teacher’s unchecked anger at a particular point in time. Certainly, this latter scenario already

has and can lead to further substantial abuse of our nation’s children.

There is no doubt that the Ministry of Education is not happy with reports such as those made in the press. The reported reaction from that section of government that “sometimes accidents do happen, but we do not like children to be injured” is not likely to encourage the parent of any abused child to be confident about the appropriate use of force in local schools. Moreover, attempts to censure any teacher for causing such an accident is likely to flounder in the absence of any clear guidelines. ■

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IN FOCUS...

The following are highlights of some of the initiatives that are ongoing at national, community, or school level to address the issue of violence against children in countries covered by UNICEF Caribbean Area Office:

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

There are many programmes nationwide that speak out against violence against children. The programmes directly and indirectly address the question of violence against children by seeking to promote the care and protection and well being of all children. One local radio stations gives daily, information about children's rights and responsibilities as a Community Service. Government has recently appointed School Counsellors, part of whose responsibility is to deal with the issue of violence.

Every year, the Family Services Division in the Ministry of Social Development has a month of activities in April as part of "Child Abuse and Prevention Month", to promote the care and well being of children. Parent Education Programmes are offered by various groups at the community level, as well as by organisations like VINSAVE, Marion House, Liberty Lodge Boys' Training Centre and relevant Government Ministries that seek to help parents to cope and to respond to their children in non-violent ways.

VINSAVE as a training institution for caregivers and pre-school teachers, offers Parent Education as part of its curriculum so that teachers can go back to their communities to share information and help parents and others to use appropriate ways of dealing with their children. In addition to this, VINSAVE has designed a Parenting Programme to be offered to parents in its centres. VINSAVE has also developed some radio and television programmes, which depict issues of children's rights and violence. These have provoked much discussion and generated ample feedback.

[Information provided by St. Vincent and The Grenadines Save The Children fund \(VINSAVE\)](#)

SURINAME

The National Network Combating violence against children, which was installed on 05 August 2002, aims to grapple with violence against children structurally.

Following the pattern of some other Caribbean countries, the month of April has been proclaimed to be Child Abuse Prevention Month in Suriname. Universal Children's Day on November 20 provides another context to promote the protection of children against violence.

The Child Rights Bureau has implemented a UNICEF sponsored project called "Alternative Disciplining in Schools". During this pilot project, teachers from six schools were trained in how to discipline children differently, because children were often "beaten up" by teachers. Slogans and spots about violence against children were broadcast on radio and television, and a song entitled "Kibri Mi" was composed about the protection of children against all forms of violence. The Child Rights Bureau launched a programme on radio and television entitled: "Child in Focus" in which children participated. These programmes encouraged discussion on the situation of children's rights, especially violence against children.

[Information made available by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing \(Child Rights Bureau\)](#)

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

A number of projects and programmes have been developed by the Ministry of Education, its partners and stakeholders in education, and coordinated by the School Intervention Strategies (SIS) Unit to address issues of violence and indiscipline in the nation's schools. Contained in a fourteen page booklet, the list of projects

[...cont'd on next page](#)

which are underway is extensive and includes: **Positive Reward System; Pre-Carnival Programme; Peace Promotion Task Force; Changing the Culture of the Classroom; Mock Trials; School and Classroom Enhancement; Public Education Programme on Parenting and Family Life Issues (School for Parents); Peace, Love and Understanding; Establishment of a National Code of Conduct for Schools; Promotion of Field Trips (a teacher aide system); Alternative Education; Establishment of Student Representative Councils in all Secondary Schools; Homework and After-School Centres; Student Time Out; Peer Mediation; Together we Light the Way; Reclaiming the Classroom (alternative strategies for transforming secondary schools); Communication Plan to Support SIS; School Physical Security.** New projects to be started are Driver Responsibility Education; Training of Community Police, Guards, Bus and Maxi Taxi Drivers; and Substitute Teachers.

The Peace Love & Understanding in Schools Programme (PLUS)

This initiative falls under the Trinidad & Tobago Coalition Against Domestic Violence which is an umbrella organisation of Non-Governmental Organisations involved in the fight against domestic violence. It is a loose coalition of associations that work in the field of anti-domestic violence, pro-peace in the family and community. The purpose of the Coalition is to assist its members in any way it can to carry out their functions, and to carry out public education programmes aimed at preventing and eradicating domestic violence, thereby improving the mental and physical health of children and promoting domestic peace and harmony.

The Coalition is very concerned about the rising levels of stress and the resulting violence among young people in the society, and has been attempting to put support systems in place to deal with this problem. It is felt that an effective way of implementing a prevention programme would be to intervene in the schools. This has proven to be successful in many countries and in the Service Volunteered for all (SERVOL) programme in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of the areas the Programme focuses on are the promotion of the Rights of the Child and to achieve this, works with the Ministry of Education to influence the whole system towards becoming more humane. It also looks at the prevention of

violence and abuse through teaching and promoting models of healthy relationships from emotionally intelligent teachers, by engaging teachers in bringing their practices in line with humanistic, child centre theory.

The Office of the Prime Minister Social Services Delivery (OPM-SSD), National Family Services Division has been addressing the issue of violence against children in its various programmes. In particular, it conducts a bi-weekly radio programme called "It's Family Time, Let's Talk" where issues pertaining to children are highlighted and discussed. Officers in their respective counties continue to organise and implement programmes for their clientele on Child Abuse, Parenting, Domestic Violence, Anger Management and Trauma Counselling. It is envisaged that with the proclamation of the various pieces of legislation, the implementation of the Pilot Family Court Project and the establishment of a Children's Authority, all these issues will be further addressed.

In 2002, a Drop-in Centre Pilot Project targeting children was established. The Pilot Project aims to provide support services in counselling for victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse and incest. It also promotes an integrated approach on the protection and rehabilitation of persons vulnerable to domestic violence and encourages the establishment of support groups at the community level, conflict resolution and violence prevention. Workshops has also been conducted for centre clients on The Psychological Effects of Domestic Violence on Children so as to sensitize parents and teachers to the additional services provided by the Centre and information continues to be disseminated on domestic violence and related issues.

The Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs chairs the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children. Currently, the Ministry is revising the NPA in the context of the outcome document of the UN Special Session for Children entitled "A World Fit for Children". A major area of study for the Ministry is the Protection Against Violence, Abuse and Exploitation of Children. The Ministry is currently preparing a document which would identify clear goals and objectives in this area, and is also monitoring the implementation of the articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which

IN FOCUS...

speak of protection of children against abuse, neglect and violence.

Over the last three years, Families in Action, a non-profit non-governmental organisation, has conducted a Conflict Parenting Programme for various groups with much success. The Programme aims to equip parents and guardians with the necessary skills so that they can: establish their own style of parenting; understand “self” in relation to parenting; understand their children’s behaviours; find alternative methods of

discipline; communicate better with children; explore their own spirituality; take some of the stress out of parenting; reflect on how they are raising their children and caring for themselves; experiment with new skills which can be applied within the family. ■

Information provided by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs



BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Domestic Violence and Children

“Stop Daddy”
“yuh hurtin’ Mummy”

Children who witness physical violence either auditory or visually, within their homes between their mothers and the adult male figure: step-father, father or boyfriend demonstrate a number of reactions and life long effects, Kolbo et al (1996) , Miller et al (1999). Some identify with the victim becoming withdrawn, fearful and depressed. Others demonstrate a phenomenon called identification with the aggressor, the child fears being harmed that he or she joins with the abuser in the aggressive behaviour. They may criticize the mother for not standing up to the abuse or the child may abuse the victim or younger siblings.

They are others, who intervene during a dispute to stop the abuse with words: “Stop Daddy” “yuh hurtin’ Mummy”. At times they may be injured, killed or they may actually stop the violence. They threatened the abuser with words, “if yuh hit mummy again I would kill yuh” or they may sleep at the victims side throughout the night or they try to stay awake all night to protect the victim.

The seed of aggression has been planted in children brought up in violent homes. These

children experienced low self-esteem, developmental delays, depression, conduct disorders, acute anxiety, and violence against others.

Who investigates?

Four professional fields are intimately involved in the investigation and treatment of child abuse: medical, psychiatric, legal, social services and law enforcement. These human services practitioners usually focus on the distressed individual rather than the group of which the troubled person is a member.

What needs to be done?

To reduce the incidence of domestic violence, the feelings of children who witness domestic violence behind the curtain, should be heard so that the seed of aggression does not grow into a tree. They should be told it’s not their fault, their fears are normal and there is help for the family. ■

*By Sharon Rose-Gittens,
Chairperson of the National Forum
Against Domestic Violence, Barbados*

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

One of the issues being addressed by the OECS Family Law and Domestic Violence Legal and Judicial Reform Project is the issue of Child Abuse. Highlighted here are three posters developed to support this aspect of the project:



To order please contact the UNICEF Caribbean Area or The Ministry of Social Service or its equivalent in your country.

NEWS FROM THE AREA

BARBADOS



Children Excited About the new Information Centre

With the start of the new school term last September, more Barbadian primary school children had a chance to get a better understanding about children's rights. This was as a result of the recently opened Information Centre at the UNICEF Office in Barbados.

The Information Centre, which was formerly only a library was transformed in April 2003 and now comprises two sections. A research area with books and other printed materials that can be used by students conducting research on issues pertaining to children in the Eastern Caribbean and Suriname and a child-friendly communication section. This communication area has a seating capacity for approximately 20 children and children on the tour view a display of children's artwork, which depicts their interpretation of the articles of the Convention. They also view a short child-friendly video produced by the Office specifically for children ages 5 - 11, aimed at dispelling many of the myths about children's rights.

To date, over two hundred primary school students have visited the Information Centre, including a group of students from Montserrat, and all have provided positive feedback about the tour. Many indicated that they had a "better understanding of their rights under the Convention" and were excited to tell others about the tour.

In addition to students, the Minister of Social Transformation in Barbados, the Honourable Hamilton Lashley, and the Director General of the Barbados Red Cross, Mr. Edmond Bradshaw, have also toured the Centre.



Students from the Wesley Hall Infants Schools in Barbados touring the UNICEF/CAO Information Centre

Launch of Monitoring Committee for Children's Rights

A new National Committee for Monitoring the Rights of the Child was launched on 03 September 2003. In her remarks, Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Social Transformation, Antoinette Williams, stated that the children of Barbados have a voice and "we will listen to them so that their opinions can be taken into account. We have allowed their voices to be heard on this Committee, where they are represented by students from the Alexandra Secondary School, the Barbados Community College, and the University of the West Indies". Representation is also drawn from the Optimist Club, the Barbados Youth Development Council and the University of the West Indies. The Committee is mandated to monitor the implementation on the Rights of the Child; monitor the progress of children in relation to the Convention; and review and update the National Plan of Action for children making it relevant to the 21st Century.

Universal Children's Day Celebrations

Universal Children's Day was marked by a concert at the Frank Collymore Hall which was attended by students from primary and secondary schools across the island. Using as its theme:- "Through the Voice of a Child", children used song and dance, poetry and drama to speak of the societal ills facing them such as HIV/AIDS, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse and teenage pregnancy.

Drawing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the programme was divided into four sections: Playing our Part: Our Right to Participate; Reaching Our Potential: Our Right to Develop who we are; Living Well: Our Right to Survival; and Being Free From Harm: Our Right to Protection. During breaks in performances, child narrators drew attention to the various rights every child should enjoy as they recited selected articles from the Convention.

The three-hour concert which featured some of the National Independence Festival of Creative Arts (NIFCA) award-winning presentations, was organised by the Child Care Board and the Ministry of Social Transformation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports and UNICEF.

COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA



Pre-sessional Working Group Committee

The Pre-sessional Working Group Committee on the Rights of the Child will take place in Dominica from 2 - 6 February 2004. This working group is a private, confidential, informal session during which the Committee meets with non-governmental organisations and UN agencies in order to prepare for its formal dialogue with the State party, due to take place in May 2004. In order to prepare for the Pre-sessional, the Committee Secretariat will prepare a country analysis, collecting all relevant information on the situation of children and their rights. UNICEF information, particularly the situation analysis, is of great value in this process, as well as any reports, studies, evaluations, or documentation that would help the Committee to get a full and accurate picture of how children's rights are being protected. The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) based in Dominica is expected to present an NGO report.

MONTSERRAT



Volcano Shake-Up

On Tuesday 26 August 2003, a group of Caribbean artistes provided entertainment for the children of Montserrat during a special variety concert, entitled "Volcano Shake-up". The concert was also attended by Hon. Idabelle Mead, Minister of Education Health & Community Services and Mr. Eugene Skerritt, Permanent Secretary in the same Ministry.

The artistes who performed included: Master Ezekiel York from Trinidad & Tobago; Egbert the Magician", storyteller Paula Taylor, the Pinelands Creative Workshop, "Thandekka" (reigning 2003 Junior Calypso Monarch in the 8 -12 age group) from Barbados; and calypsonians "De Bear", "De Cub" and Little Kimmy (reigning 2002 Junior Calypso Monarch) from Antigua & Barbuda. There were also performances by a Montserratian dance troupe.

The entertainment concert, aimed at helping children to de-stress during the post-volcanic eruption period, was one of several priorities identified by the Government of Montserrat following the volcano's eruption on 12 July 2003. Another priority identified by the Government was an out-of island visit for some of the island's children. With the aid of the UNICEF Caribbean Area Office, the Barbados Red Cross, and a number of co-sponsors, Barbados played host to a group of children from Montserrat from 19 - 28 August.

Universal Children's Day Celebrated

Montserratians joined the global community to ensure the survival, protection and growth of children, as they observed International Children's Day on 20 November.

Children from government and private schools and centres for special education participated in a number of special functions to embrace the special day. The day, which was an educational and fun day to make children feel special and loved, climaxed with a live radio panel discussion and call-in programme to reinforce children's rights and to educate the public and children about the importance of these rights. The initiative was led by the Community Services Department.

Leading up to 20 November, selected Articles from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child were read on the radio by school children. On the day itself, secondary school students read the news on Radio Montserrat. Each school was allocated a 10 - 15 minute radio spot for an activity of their choice e.g. a poem, a song etc. Rights awareness assemblies were conducted at all schools, pamphlets were distributed, and a one-day student presentation workshop on the Rights of the Child was conducted.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



Parenting Conference

Trinidad and Tobago held its first ever Parenting Conference in October 2003. This workshop, "Parenting Our Future", was hosted by the non-governmental

NEWS FROM THE AREA

organisation, Creative Parenting for the Future (CPNE) and funded by the J B Fernandez Memorial Trust.

CPNE grew out of a growing concern about the breakdown in family life and its effects not only on children, but on the society as a whole. They recognize that although many groups are pursuing this common goal of working in the area of parenting and family life there is as yet no consensus about methodology. This conference created an opportunity for sharing insights and experiences and developing collaborative strategies for intervention while achieving its objectives of raising consciousness and discussion about what constitutes effective parenting in today's society while exploring the various methodologies.

The conference involved a cross section of stakeholders, including parents, parenting educators, theorists, policy makers and young people. Participants were all fully involved in panel discussions, workshops sessions and plenary presentations. The simultaneous workshops addressed topics such as: Alternatives to Corporal Punishment, Anger Transmutation and the Spiritual Aspect of Parenting.

The intended outcome of the conference was to develop an Action Plan for equipping Trinidad and Tobago with appropriate tools for parenting education and a document which would inform government policy on Family Life issues.

National Assessment of Vulnerable Children

The Health Economics Unit of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, will commence a Situation Analysis of Children Orphaned and Vulnerable to and by HIV/AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago, in January 2004. Trinidad & Tobago features among the list of countries with a high prevalence rate for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. According to the Unit, based on seroprevalence studies conducted at Antenatal clinics and assessments of the National Surveillance Systems, it is estimated that there are roughly 17,000 HIV positive individuals nationally. When adjusted for underreporting and other related shortcomings that may allow individual to slip through the surveillance net, this is estimated (in some quarters), to be as high as 39,000 men, women and children.

The study aims to identify the extent and the ways that children, families and communities are affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic; to quantify, as far as possible, the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and families and to project how the nature and magnitude of these problems can be expected to change over time; to assess the response of the government bodies, international organizations, NGOs, and other civil society groups in responding to problems facing children and families affected by HIV/AIDS over the last two decades, highlighting the problems encountered by these groups/organisations and their planned programmes in the future; and to identify priorities among the problems identified including geographic areas for priority attention, potentially effective policies, programmes and other actions, identification of the most promising opportunities and partners for advancing these programmes and policies, and suitable mechanisms for coordinating and monitoring these programmes.

Second Periodic Report on CRC Implementation

With the submission of the second period report on CRC Implementation Trinidad & Tobago's reporting is now completely up-to-date on all human rights conventions. The launch, which was hosted by the Human Rights Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, embraced the Ministers of Education and Social Development and the Minister responsible for Social Services Delivery.

The following activities, which fall within the Government/UNICEF Programme of Cooperation for 2003-2007 were highlighted by respective Ministers as priorities: revision of the National Plan of Action for Children, improved birth registration, ECD Standards School Health Programme, Programme for Adolescent Mothers, establishment of Children's Authority, register for Children in Need, Child Labour, and Child Rights Promotion.

[...cont'd on next page](#)

REGIONAL

Regional Director Honours PAREDOS During His Visit



Photo by UNICEF

UNICEF TACRO Regional Director presents plaque to Marva Springer, Director of PAREDOS.

(Inset) Marashetty Seenappa – UNICEF CAO Programme Coordinator

During his recent visit to the UNICEF Caribbean Area Office – the new UNICEF regional Director for the Latin America and the Caribbean (TACRO) took the opportunity to honour the Barbados –based parenting NGO – PAREDOS- and the Nation newspaper for their outstanding work on the Parenting page called: “Parent-Wise.” The page which was initially funded by the UNICEF Caribbean Office, provides parenting tips and other helpful advice on child development on a weekly basis to readers and has received extremely positive feedback from the public. Upon the completion of the funding from UNICEF CAO at the beginning of 2003, the Nation and PAREDOS continued to produce this weekly page as a community service to their readers.

Parenting Symposium

Under the banner “Towards a Regional Parenting Framework: Innovations in Parenting Education and Support”, a regional parenting symposium was held from 15 - 17 October in St. Maarten. Some of the issues highlighted during this meeting were as follows: fathers were increasingly seeking active roles in the rearing of children but were constrained by the actions of mothers

and the prevailing laws; good parenting reduced risk behaviour in adolescents and promoted their resilience; and programming for males should take into account their perspectives and special concerns.

Important strategies and mechanisms for the effective delivery and coordination of parenting education and support programmes were discussed. They included: the approach by the Coalition for Better Parenting Lifecycle Parenting Education and Support Model (Jamaica); and the proposed revision of the Parenting Facilitators Guide – Pathways to Parenting. The symposium was organised and hosted by the Caribbean Support Initiative (CSI) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF) in collaboration with UNICEF.

Training Course in Breast-milk Substitutes

Approximately 25 - 30 legal and health officers from across the Caribbean benefited from a one-week training course on the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk substitutes. The aim of this workshop, which was held from 3 - 7 November at the Kapok Hotel, was to assist regional governments in implementing the International Code of Marketing for breast milk substitutes.

It has been noted that in the Caribbean, whilst there has been significant progress in the Health sector in the implementation of policies to limit marketing of breast-milk substitutes, and subsequently to promote breastfeeding, there has been limited, if any, movement on the legislative front. Therefore, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the promotion of breastfeeding, the marketing of breast-milk substitutes has to be regulated in accordance with the International Code, which was adopted in 1981 by the World Assembly.

The workshop was conducted by Ms. Annelies Allain, Director of IBFAN; Ms. Yeong Joo Kean, Legal Advisor from IBFAN; Mr. David Clarke, Legal Advisor from UNICEF Headquarters; and Dr. Chessa Lutter from PAHO. It was also open to non-governmental organisations, which have been working towards the promotion and public education of breast-feeding.

The Informative Breastfeeding Service (TIBS) of Trinidad and Tobago was the major local partner in organising this training course which was sponsored by UNICEF and PAHO, in collaboration with International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). ■