

## **Family Violence in the Caribbean**

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### **The Caribbean in Context**

The region of the world known as the Caribbean is an archipelago of islands that form the boundaries of the Caribbean Sea, from the southernmost tip of North America down to the northern coast of South America. Some islands in the Atlantic Ocean and a few countries on the coasts of South and Central America self-identify, politically and culturally as Caribbean. The region reveals a mix of joint and separate histories with English, Dutch, French and Spanish colonial control. The close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the formation of a politically unifying force among the English-speaking nations known as the Commonwealth Caribbean, now referred to as the CARICOM region (CARICOM, 2011a, 2011b), and includes 14 member states: and five associates. The group comprises: Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & The Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago. Members in the Atlantic include the Bahamas, Bermuda and Turks & Caicos. On the mainland are Belize in Central America, and Guyana in South America. There are two exceptions to the English speaking history of CARICOM membership - Suriname, located on the coast of South America, of Dutch heritage; and HAITI in the north with French as its official language. The population of the region is 16 million, with 7 million in Haiti alone (CARICOM 2007, 2011c). Under this specific Caribbean context, island nations such as the Spanish speaking Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are omitted along with the United States Virgin islands and the other Dutch and French territories lying in the Caribbean Sea, all of whom can fall between the cracks of research and documentation for various reasons.

An examination of policies and UN activities in the region can become complicated. Some analyses may view the Caribbean from the perspective of the CARICOM collective. Other analyses lump all islands that are situated in the Caribbean Sea under the header of 'Latin America and the Caribbean' which can be misleading or only minimally informative. Based on population numbers, the islands can be rendered insignificant next to the populous countries of Central and South America. Writers and researchers of Caribbean heritage tend to demonstrate more attention to specifics in covering the Caribbean diaspora. Writing about Family Violence in the Caribbean demands this type of attention to detail since we are dealing with a complex region of self-governing micro-nations (Gibbons, 2013). Scholars who study family violence agree that family violence occurs in all cultures and that regardless of cultural differences and geography, there are common elements across all societies such as the social and economic toll and the constraints that block progress in eliminating it. The Caribbean islands may appear to be dots on the map of the world, but the issues of the region are representative of the challenges of confronting family violence anywhere whether in a micro-nation in the third world or a powerful first world country. Unfortunately, family violence is a unifying global concept. It is the shadow that haunts human rights efforts everywhere.

## **Defining Family Violence**

Family Violence is a term used interchangeably with domestic violence in discourse among family scholars; it covers physical, social and emotional abuse and acts of aggression within relationships that are considered as family connections or akin to family connections. In the broader arena of global conferencing, policy-making, research, and documentation, there is inconsistency in its application, and it is not unusual to encounter double descriptors in the literature such as 'domestic violence and intimate partner violence.' Gradually, researchers, scholars and legal experts have begun to accept the broader concept of Family Violence to include married couples, intimate partners whether living together or dating, and violence between parents and children. The concept further reaches into other areas of the family that were excluded from scrutiny in times past such as sibling violence, child to parent violence, elder abuse, and violence between close relatives such as uncles and their nieces and nephews, grand-parents and grand-children, adopted parents and adopted children, foster parents and foster children, step-parents and their step-children plus step-siblings. With the growing acceptance of same-sex intimate partnerships and marriage, family violence also encompasses such confrontations within lesbian, gay and transgender couples and their families. Many researchers and scholars are reluctant to describe as family violence, aggressive acts between casual intimate partners or between former partners and ex-spouses and lean towards the term, 'Intimate Partner Violence' (IPV). Questions also arise on whether or not to count statistically violence that is known to occur with dating couples. In the US for example, the phrase 'dating couple' may cover the spectrum of teens having a romantic relationship that may include sexual activity, right up to committed unmarried couples who are linked romantically and socially but perhaps not domestically. In this presentation, the term "family violence" will be used comprehensively for the most part, but 'domestic violence' and 'intimate partner violence' will also be used if that is the way they are referenced in specific literature and published reports.

## **Understanding Family Violence through Family Science**

Through the discipline of Family Science, practitioners study the internal dynamics of families, the changing structure and roles of families, formal and informal dimensions of family, and the interface between family and the society. Family professionals are clear that family is the first environment in which gender roles and expectations are transmitted and entrenched, where patterns of violence are established and rationalizations for gender-based violence are formulated (Barnett et al, 2005; McCue, 2008; NRC, 1998). In the interface between family and society, the feedback of social and cultural acceptance of family violence strengthens the perceptions learned within the family, thus leading to spill-over into the society at large of violence as a means of for problem-solving, gaining or re-acquiring dominance over someone else. This recursive reinforcement of a norm of violence underlies the uphill battle faced over the years by all advocates against family violence.

Despite the progress made internationally on the wording and ratifications of legal conventions and declarations condemning domestic violence specifically, and violence against women generally, evidence points to the fact that family violence persists at high and increasing rates. Among family scholars following the evidence (Gelles, 2010), there is consensus that family violence is a serious societal problem. It is widely known that violence against women and girls is a major expression of power and control within the family and society. Laws that seek to protect women can be perceived as laws that wrest authority away from men, setting up an atmosphere of antagonism at the level of policy-makers, law enforcers, the courts, and tensions within the family itself. Finding effective responses to global violence against women and children demand that we examine the roots of culture within which gender-based violence

resides. This starts with re-educating nations about the power of family-based patterns of behavior as a foundation for violence in the society. Laws can prescribe, pressure and punish, but laws by themselves do not change behavior that is as deeply rooted as family violence. The current challenge is to explore the problems associated with operationalizing the new laws within the context of the family-based factors that impede progress. Theoretical perspectives embraced by family scholars can be the foundation for programs aimed at reducing family violence. These include Social Learning theory which explains that family violence is learned and can be unlearned (Bandura, 1973); General Strain Theory which acknowledges that family and social stressors can trigger violence and that resolution of strains can minimize violent outbursts (Agnew, 1992); Pro-feminist theory which supports the human rights of women and girls and also promotes programs to reduce patterns of patriarchy in society (Dobash & Dobash, 1979); Ecological theory which underpins the connections between family and society, explains the complexities of inter-relationships within the home and family, and supports community-based interventions. (Bubolz et al.; Garbarino, 1977; National Research Council, 1998; Pagelow, 1984). The Family Strengths theoretical framework is known to be effective as a model for forging change and growth in families (Olson & Defrain, 2003).

### **Family in the Caribbean**

In the Caribbean family life exists within a milieu of cultural, religious, racial and ethnic differences which cut across the geographical proximities, and shape the household and family structures (CARICOM 2007, 2011c). The term “family” can stretch to cover formal and informal unions as well as family and intimate relationships across different households. General statistics for the Caribbean show that 80% of children are born outside of marriage and that multiple mating patterns are prevalent (Barrow, 1996; CARICOM, 2011c; Dreher & Hudgins, 2010; St. Bernard, 1997, 2003). These facts align with the high percentage of female headed households. Complex family relationships can involve previous and current partners, siblings and half-siblings who do not all live in the same household. There are also variations on the theme. Marriage rates in Trinidad and Guyana are much higher than the average for the region, which means that places such as Haiti, Jamaica and the islands of Eastern Caribbean, skew the region’s averages on non-marital unions similarly to how Guyana and Trinidad skew the averages for marital unions. Marriage statistics in Trinidad and Guyana show that marriage is more prevalent among nationals of East-Indian descent than among nationals of African descent. The former have Hinduism and Islam as their major religions with doctrines that have profound implications for family life. (St. Bernard, 1997, 2003). For example, the special Hindu Marriage Act (Laws of Trinidad & Tobago, 2009) allows fathers the decision-making power to marry off their daughters at age 14, not prejudiced by the legal cut-off age for girls in the general population which is 16; all boys have to be 18. Early marriage is known to be a stumbling block to the full development of girls. Marriage is also more prevalent among the other ethnic groups that comprise Caribbean populations - Caucasian, Chinese, Portuguese, Syrian Lebanese, and people of mixed ancestry. (UNICEF, 2007, UNDP, 2011. Similar to what obtains in larger countries, where there is marriage there is also divorce and separation, currently at high rates, leaving in the wake a slew of step-families and step siblings, remarried families and new non-married couplings, making the job of statisticians extremely difficult as regards categorization.

Concern has been expressed about the omission from public discourse statistics, of the indigenous, first peoples of the Caribbean, previously referred to as ‘Indians, not to be confused with the sub-populations of East-Indians whose ancestors came from India. (Forte, 2011, 2012) pointed out the failure of the Trinidad & Tobago’s government to categorize indigenous peoples in the 2010 census and also tracked the struggle for equal treatment and reparation by the indigenous peoples of Dominica (Forte, 2011). Similar efforts have been documented in St.

Vincent and Belize (McIntoshlan, 1999). Anecdotal reports document higher levels of illiteracy, poverty and early child bearing among the indigenous populations as well as family violence. The UN continues to press CARICOM to include indigenous populations in social policy objectives (United Nations, 2009). Family life among the indigenous groups follows traditional patterns for the group. Policy makers are ambivalent about seeming to intrude on life on the reservations, hence they tend to exclude from the watchful eye of statistical evidence the patterns of indigenous families and by extension the prevalence or incidence of family violence

Lack of clarity about categorization mean that Caribbean statisticians tend to confine their data sets and reports to a narrow view of family that derives from first world norms and may use different types of headings to cover violent acts even if these occur among or between individuals that the society and community accept as family. Self-reports about family violence that are made to police stations or hospitals may not be tagged that way, depending on perceptions of the person receiving the reports, or the person documenting the details, or based on the confines of family relationships in the boxes on the standardized reporting forms. Terminology becomes important to the discourse since uncertainty, personal opinion and the inconsistency of terms skew statistics and reporting. In the Caribbean, nuances of terminology exist. Sociological data as well as National Insurance forms allow for living together relationships to be acknowledged as family as well as visiting relationships where the couple may not be living together but share an intimate relationship many times with children involved. When it comes to documenting family violence, there can be double jeopardy. In other words, in the Caribbean, men with any semblance of family or family type connection to a specific woman or child may receive a cultural pass when he is the perpetrator of physical, emotional or sexual violence against the woman or child in his life whether he is a formal spouse, reputed spouse, brief dating partner, a temporary step parent, or a former spouse or lover. On the other hand, because categorizations are murky, such occurrences are usually excluded from statistics on family violence, creating unreliable information on incidence and prevalence. Definitions of 'family' are not about semantics. Definitions can often determine who benefits from a program and who does not; definitions also convey society's beliefs about what is normative and socially sanctioned (Bogenshneider, 2006), and by implication, what is deviant, or what should be punished. There needs to be agreement between policy-makers and society about how far the law should reach into the norms of family life or retreat from the boundaries.

### **Economics and Religion**

Non-marital unions are accepted within the social norms of the Caribbean. Yet, all economic indices show a direct link between marriage and women's economic well-being (CARICOM, 2011c; UNICEF, 2007). There are conflicting conclusions in the literature on the extent to which economic wellbeing is related to family violence (Gelles, 2010). Compared to many countries, the economic activity rate for women in the English-speaking Caribbean is relatively high. (UNDP, 2011; UNDP et al., 2011; UNICEF, 2007). A direct consequence to family life is that, women are caught in the double bind of having household responsibilities and child care along with their employment outside the home. Tensions in the home have been correlated with stress-related violence between parents and children and between spouses and partners. Confounding factors of the intersections of ethnicity, social class, economic conditions and group norms need to be further examined as pathways to some scenarios of family violence even if they do not explain away all incidents of family violence.

Caribbean people as a whole describe themselves as very religious and there are compelling reasons that religion must be examined as a factor in family violence or dealing with family violence. Religion is entrenched in the lives of Caribbean people and has played a role in oppression, subjugation and sexism from the days of colonialism (Hylton, 2012; Mitchell, 2006).

There is current sentiment that religious oppression continues (On religion and rights in the Caribbean, 2015). Hinduism and Islam have already been mentioned as influencing laws, state policies, and practice (Roopnarine et al, 1997). Traditional world religions such as Catholics, Methodists and Anglicans are spread across the Caribbean with conservative Christianity gaining a foothold, and vestiges of afro-Caribbean religions in pockets. Religion has been viewed as a source of succor for victims, but religion has also been cited as reasons why women and girls do not self-report incidents of abuse, and also reasons for men to use physical control of their spouses and children in the name of religion (Ellison et al, 1999; Rodriguez-Menes & Safranof, 2012). Research and historical facts support the conclusions that religion disempowers women and girls, promotes patriarchy and male dominance and creates a sexist culture on which violence breeds (Rodrigues-Menes & Safranof, 2012). Advocates for social change should be cognizant of voices that point out the influence of religion over private behavior as well as public policy in areas where religion can be a deterrent for progress on gender issues (On Religion and rights in the Caribbean, 2015).

### **History of Awareness and Caribbean Regional Responses to Violence against Women**

Much has been written about gender-based violence since 1975, the watershed year for global women's rights which culminated with the International Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975. Discrimination against women was high on the agenda which led to the agreements and commitments that were documented in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international comprehensive United Nations document popularly known as the Women's Bill of Rights, The articles of this Convention meant to put systems in place to ensure that women everywhere are treated like human beings and given the same fundamental rights as their male counterparts. It became instructive in retrospect that CEDAW did not mention anything about violence against women in its 30 articles, except for Article 6 that singled out Trafficking of women for prostitution (UN Women, 2015). This gap was redressed in 1992 when the CEDAW committee issued a recommendation that identified domestic violence as well as rape, trafficking for prostitution, certain traditional practices and sexual harassment as discriminations covered by the Convention. This effort has been major in bringing Domestic Violence to the forefront of calls for change across the world, including the Caribbean region. The agencies of the United Nations, jointly and separately have always been very active in the Caribbean (Kharas, 2007; PAHO, 2010; UNDP, 2010; UNDP et al, 2011). Joint Conferences and Meetings work towards ensuring that Caribbean governments ratify UN conventions and then act on UN guidelines on social development issues. Along with the work on domestic violence, abuse and maltreatment of children have been uppermost on the agenda as well. For example, the CRC was passed by the United Nations in 1989. By the year 2001 all Caribbean nations had ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This means that all Caribbean states have made a policy commitment to the articles of the CRC, and have pledged through the process of ratification to "undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention" (Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child). CRC influenced the push to create policies affecting children such as Child Protection, Age of Consent, and Age of Marriage.

Countries of the Caribbean have multiple identities if judged by global and regional institutional memberships. One of these identities is membership in the Organization of American States (OAS), one of the world's oldest regional organizations, dating back to 1889 (OAS, 2012a). Its thirty-five members are the countries of the Americas, including the USA, Canada, countries of Central and South America and the 14 Caribbean States who are members of CARICOM as sovereign countries are individual members of the OAS. The Inter-

American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (known as the Convention of Belém do Pará after the city where it was signed) was adopted by the OAS in 1994. It recognizes that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights and defines violence in both the public and private spheres. All Caribbean countries committed to implementing The Convention of Belém do Pará which defines violence against women as "... any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere". The reference to private sphere is a clear indication that countries signatory to the OAS convention must also accept that women should be protected from family violence. The multilateral treaty (OAS, 1994) called upon State parties to: include in their domestic legislation penal, civil, administrative and any other type of provisions that may be needed to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women and to adopt appropriate administrative measures where necessary; establish fair and effective legal procedures for women who have been subjected to violence which include, among others, protective measures, a timely hearing and effective access to such procedures and adopt legal measures to require the perpetrator to refrain from harassing, intimidating or threatening the woman or using any method that harms or endangers her life or integrity, or damages her property(OAS, 2012b).

In 2004, UNIFEM, Caribbean Office published a Question and Answer Booklet '*CEDAW Made Easy*' to be used as a resource by women's rights advocates, government officials, practitioners, teachers and students, and anyone else who may wish to learn more about the struggle for women's human rights. Constitutional reform continues to be the major objective and the biggest hurdle perceived between the written articles of CEDAW and enactment of laws that mirror the CEDAW articles. This UNIFEM document summarized that across the region, there was an absence of systematic research and accurate statistics concerning violence against women and that evidence pointed to it being an increasing problem. Sample surveys accessed by UNIFEM indicated that one in three adult women in relationships were the victims of domestic abuse of varying severity from assault and battery to torture. Also, reports they gathered from rape crisis centers throughout the Caribbean suggested that only one in eight victims report the sexual offence to the police. Surveys from nine Caribbean countries found that 48 per cent of adolescent girls who had experienced intercourse reported that their first sexual intercourse had been forced. In several countries, it was reported that 60 per cent of young people have been initiated into sexual activity by the age of 12 (UNIFEM, 2004). There continue to be some strong cultural and social beliefs and sexist attitudes about women. A critical message is that the threads connect to reiterate that the greatest threat of violence to women comes from their families and partners

Gains which have been made in elevating societal consciousness as regards violence against women could be gauged from the formulation of a host of responses by Caribbean NGOs and governments to international statements on the issue. Clarke (1998) pointed out that within the Caribbean, domestic violence has been the most central terrain on which women's organizations have fought the battle to eliminate gender discrimination. The governmental response in the Caribbean concentrated on legal reform, following the extended guidelines from the international instruments, which addressed violence against women. Broad collaborative efforts on the part of advocacy groups and diverse women's organizations resulted in removing the veils of privacy that shields family violence and highlighting it as a public and therefore political issue Clarke, 1998). In addition, women's organizations worked together to demand state action, particularly in the area of legislative reform (Gibbons, 2013). The CARICOM Women's Desk developed model legislation dealing with domestic violence and sexual offences. These models have been used by several governments in the region as the basis for revision of legislation (CARICOM, 1997; 2011d). A case in point is that all CARICOM countries

provide criminal sanctions for sexual offences against women and declare rape, indecent assault, defilement, procuring and abducting of females to be criminal offences (Clarke, 1998). In addition specific provisions are also made for the rape or carnal knowledge of female children, the extent of punishment being dependent on the age of the victim. Clarke (1998) found that for most of the countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean, the common law on rape continues to be in force but the codes are restatements of old English rules, but that there has been a move towards redressing the substantive and procedural law governing such offences. The CARICOM Secretariat developed model legislation in 1997 addressing issues such as: the scope of the sexual offences and the criminalization of rape within marriage. The Bahamas, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago (OAS 2012b) already have amended sexual offense legislation. In addition to guidelines on sexual offences, the entire model legislation document also focuses on Domestic Violence among other offenses.

### **Achievements and Repercussions from CEDAW and CRC**

While those efforts continue apace, it is important to reflect on the issue of Family Violence and how it interacts with both the articles of CEDAW and the real obstructions to women being allowed to assume their equal place alongside their male partners in their home countries. The Caribbean Region can be discussed as a sample of these thrusts and counter-thrusts in eliminating violence against women and girls, but similarities can be found in all countries from the first world United States to the most resistant second and third world countries where the sheer horror of violence against girls and women have made international headlines daily. Researchers view domestic violence, including intimate partner violence as complex and contextual (Mc Cue, 2008). There is no culture or tradition or geographical region of the world that is untouched by family violence, but from a global perspective, there is under-reporting, lack of consistency in how data are reported resulting in an incomplete picture of incidence and prevalence in the Caribbean as anywhere else. Efforts of CEDAW to make family violence a human rights violation and ratification by most countries of the Caribbean mean that the rhetoric has changed. On the other hand, violence against women and children has continued unabated. Reports have increased although this may be due to the changes in the law and education efforts to encourage reporting. Achieving actual reduction in incidence is the real challenge.

Concerns about implementation of the articles of CEDAW have been voiced officially and unofficially (McCue, 2008). One of the arguments is that laws based on CEDAW can result in frivolous charges against assumed perpetrators. There are contradictions in family relationships which may be the main reason the law and enforcers of the law proceed cautiously and favor cultural perceptions of it being a private matter when faced with family violence. There is anecdotal evidence of women and girls reporting perpetrators and then retracting their accusations, some accusers even admitting that their testimony was false. One is never sure on which side a cover-up exists. Family and community pressure comes to bear on any female who accuses a family member or intimate partner of physical and sexual violence or abuse against the women and girls within the family circle or extended circle. She can be coerced into retracting her story. Arguments also exist that laws derived from CEDAW will lead to the destruction of the institution of family as it is known (McCue, 2008). Social and economic support can be undermined for the accusers. Arguments against some of the articles of CRC are similar. Opponents point to the undermining of parental authority, encouraging accusations of wrongdoing against parents. Without parental authority, traditions are challenged, some for good reason, but still they shake the foundation of cultural prerogatives given to parents.

On broader terms, there are arguments in the developed world against redefining family beyond direct generational succession and connection and confine family to the traditional three

degrees of kindred. In the Caribbean, redefinition means the opposite, that is, defying centuries of tradition that include all formal and informal connections as family, and buying into the first world view that unless you are connected by blood as the father, mother, child of those parents, grandmother or grandfather, sister or brother uncle or aunt, nephew or niece, violence does not count as family violence. This is one of the challenges for law reform. Clarity will determine the categories in statistical reports. Nevertheless, such clarity and narrow boundaries as defined by law do not diminish the power of intergenerational and cultural transmission of patterns of violence that are learned within constructs of family, whatever those constructs might be. Researchers corroborate that children who witness violence in their homes have negative developmental outcomes independent of any abuse they may have directly experienced at the hands of their caretakers (Gelles, 2010). This is not confined to genetic parents or nuclear households. Negative repercussions mean that abused children more often than not grow up to become perpetrators of family violence or other public acts of violence. Research is available that shows that women and girls to be the most frequent victims and men and boys in the family or household to be the main aggressors (Gelles, 2010).

### **Men as victims of Family Violence**

Despite the widely held perception that family violence is a one sided picture of men as perpetrators and women and girls as victims, there is evidence of men in the family being victims of physical violence by a family member, and boys as victims of family sexual abuse. Current definitions of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse mean that men and boys are protected under the law if women are the perpetrators in the family or intimate relationship. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2011) in their Global Study on Homicide examined statistics in 5 Caribbean countries, Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Vincent and Trinidad & Tobago. The report acknowledged a very high rate of murders in these countries – an average of 31 per thousand compared with 6.9 per thousand as the global average and that half of all female victims were killed by a family member and that 80% of the perpetrators were men. Their updated figures of 2013 (UNODC, 2013) also revealed that 12% of men who were killed in Grenada for example, were as a result of domestic or intimate partner violence. The UNODC report also cited men killed in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, a lot through increasing drug related street violence, but 7 % in Jamaica and 4% in Trinidad & Tobago were killed as a result of family violence. There is no trustworthy bank of statistics on the sexual abuse of boys in the family, but this is an area that is also severely underreported for cultural reasons and needing research exploration for fact finding.

### **Theory of the Crisis of Masculinity and the link to Family Violence**

Another type of male victimization has been recently cited as loss of masculinity and has been directly linked by social commentators to the rise in family violence. A 2012 article published by NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America) connects the collapse of Caribbean economies starting in 2011 to the observed spike in domestic violence (Edmonds, 2012). The article termed the phenomenon a ‘crisis of masculinity’ related to rising unemployment and men’s desire to reestablish their dominance and control. The word used in the Caribbean for the assumed rights of men to have dominance and control over their women is “macho” a familiar term to Latin American neighbors. Edmonds examined statistics on domestic and relationship murders culled from Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and pointed out that the primary cause of most murders – 100% in Grenada, was domestic violence. This last statistic is supported in UNODC reports. There are mixed messages in such public analyses. The aspect of stress related family violence has some support in the literature (Gelles, 2010), unemployment being at the top of the list of life stressors. The flip side is that such articles suggest that men’s rightful position in their family and intimate relationship is one

of power and control and that they should be excused if loss of this position is the trigger for their use of violence against the women and children in their lives. The correlation between men's loss of status and power and the incidence of family violence exists but needs specific research and programs to address men's and women's concerns in this regard.

CEDAW seeks to commit governments in the region to eliminate cultural practices that perpetuate discrimination and gender stereotyping. Within Article 12 for example, women and girls are to be given equal access to education and employment, rights to ownership of property, succession rights, equal rights to choose residence, and unrestrained participation in economic life (UNIFEM, 2004). In practice, these changes are designed to turn culture on its head, which is what is needed to fulfill the promises that CEDAW, CRC and the Convention of Belem have made to women. The crisis of masculinity is not an acceptable excuse for family violence, but it serves as an explanation that warrants attention. Advocates for the speedy implementation of the articles of CEDAW at the country level must remain aware of the fall-out effect on families and relationships. Within the society, it is easy for the rise in women's status to be ascribed as the major cause of men's violence (Edmonds, 2012). This may seem far-fetched especially when gender-based violence in families has been known to exist prior to CEDAW and was a de facto impetus for CEDAW. But correlation can appear to be legitimate cause and effect to societies seeking an explanation for the rise in men's violence occurring at the same time as a rise in male unemployment and also at the same time as legal protections are put in place for the rights of women to access employment and to determine their own futures. Such correlations should not be dismissed, but instead serve as a starting point for new research that can lead to targeted programs to distill fears and find common ground.

### **The International Year of the Family: Conflicts and Confluence between goals for Women and Girls and Goals for Family Well-being**

There is acknowledgment in the literature that built-in conflict exists between the goals of family cohesiveness and the attainment of the hard-fought human rights benefits and individual freedoms that accrue to women, such as women's career opportunities, equal wages, and reproductive rights (Bogenschneider et al, 2012). Based on this conflict, it is not imaginary that tension exists where women's empowerment can be perceived as the emasculation of men. Of note is the phenomenon that progress on girls education has been so advanced in the Caribbean that girls are succeeding at school at a measurably higher rate than boys, and that university graduates in the Caribbean are 66% female (The World Bank, 2012; UNESCO, 2012). This is a positive outcome of the efforts to gain equal access to education for girls and boys. On the other hand, it portends negatively for boys and men and family peace. Women have been known to refuse promotions and job relocations because of fears of family and relationship repercussions (ILO/UNDP, 2009). There is anecdotal evidence that professional and high achieving women are targets for family violence. But on the other side are rural women who have been identified as the poorest of the poor and so far, failed by CEDAW (Chambers, 2010) even though CEDAW highlighted the importance of programs for rural women in Article 14 (UNIFEM, 2004). Barbados has been singled out as the only CARICOM nation where inroads are being made into the reduction of dire poverty among rural women (Chambers, 2010). If rural women are suffering, then girls in such households are subject to deprivations and abuse. Men have not fared well economically either in the rural Caribbean (Edmonds, 2012) setting up an oppressive stranglehold for families as a whole, such oppression already linked to gender-based violence.

UN proclamation of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in 1994 recognized the importance of family life as central to social development and sought to promote the

inherent strengths of families and support families in their functions. As a focal point on the family, IYF has a mission statement that includes among its primary activities: to promote the integration of a family perspective into policy-making at the national, regional and international levels; to liaise and dialogue with Governments, civil society and the private sector on family issues; to exchange expertise and experiences, disseminate information and support networking on family issues; to support family research and diagnostic studies; and to encourage and support coordination on family policies and programs within national governments and within the United Nations system (United Nations, 2015). For small governments with limited manpower and measured expertise, it is a chore to untangle the various instruments of UN declarations, proclamations and conventions, no matter how well-intentioned they are for global development. Expertise must be made available to find common ground among the principles and articles under CEDAW, CRC and annual goals of IYF which can appear to be either redundant or contradictory. Efforts should be made to dispel the general reaction to the objectives of IYF as either a softening on the principles of CEDAW and CRC, or a consolation nod to the role of men in the family. Education programs, sensitivity training, and programs to alleviate the economic crises for men are all critical pieces in the solution for allowing women and girls the dignity of human rights while enabling men to be supportive and equal rather than unequal partners in the outcomes of the struggle and potential victims in the process despite the built-in male privileges, power and dominance inherent in the society.

### **The Role of Men**

In the Caribbean, when one speaks of 'gender issues' the assumption is that the discussion is about women. Following 1975 which heralded the United Nations International Women's Year, new policies on women and domestic violence led to the establishment of ministries for women's affairs within all Caribbean government. Eventual attempts to appear to be gender-inclusive led to title changes replacing the word 'women' with 'gender' so that a 'Bureau of Women's Affairs' became a 'Bureau of Gender Affairs or' 'Office of Gender Equality' The name changes alone has not removed the reality that these offices serve the developmental needs of women. Gradually, with growing unemployment levels among men in the Caribbean, and reports on girls surpassing boys in school achievement (CARICOM, 2007; 2011c; UN/DESA, 2011; UNESCO, 2012; UNDP, 2011), the gender bureaus should begin to give equal time to the conditions of men's lives, policies affecting men and boys, challenges of fatherhood, and programs to promote men's role in relationships and family.

The UN Report on Men in Families (UN/DESA, 2011) provided a list of relevant issues affecting families and the role of men in addressing them. Among the identified issues are: the need to look at men's reproductive health, labor market involvement, rearing of children and men's availability to their families. The report pushes for law reform to address: paternal leave, same sex relationships, migrant labor, minimum wage and social services for men. There is some prevailing sentiment that women are not responsible for men's feelings of being left behind. The challenge for the movement towards the elimination of discrimination against women is to be wary of reinforcing men as antagonists and also to be aware of the dual consciousness of most women who would like real relationships with their men while also needing protection from men for themselves and their children in the face of the realities of family violence. Engaging boys and girls at the level of secondary school in these conversations would open up the dialogue towards understanding of themselves and each other across the gender divide. The UNIFEM booklet (UNIFEM, 2004) should be a text in a compulsory Social Studies class. It is also time to revisit Family Life Education in primary and

secondary schools where the renewed objective should be a curriculum that addresses family formation, family structure, norms and challenges, and gender issues in the family as they are played out in society, understanding that the word 'gender' covers both men and women and is not a euphemism for 'woman' nor a ready excuse to focus only on the woman's agenda. Family Life Education provides a platform to examine family violence and how to contain it. Further efforts can be made on University campuses in the Caribbean to encourage qualitative research efforts to listen to men's issues and inform the action to include men's life goals and family goals in the development agenda.

### **The Future of Family focused Policies**

An examination of the constitutions of all Caribbean countries in 2004 reveal that most of them have a general guarantee of fundamental rights without discrimination, including statements on non-discrimination based on sex or gender (UNIFEM, 2004). All countries made a commitment to the principles of CEDAW, but actual follow-up of the articles of CEDAW through periodic reporting has fallen off over the years. A search of CEDAW available public records reveal that periodic reports which were expected from all international members became fewer and fewer globally (UN Women, 2015). Two of 14 Caribbean countries presented reports to the CEDAW committee in 2001 – Guyana and Jamaica; four tabled reports in 2002 – Barbados, St. Kitts & Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago; Jamaica alone presented a report in 2006 and Belize only in 2007, the last year that CEDAW functioned under UN Women (UN Women, 2015). Lessons from the most recent reports, from Belize and Jamaica are instructive. Jamaica reported on progress with existing programs for women and children, but cited major obstacles with new programs and lamented that the pace of change was slow due to the sluggish legislative process; the report tabled a request for professional resources such as an expert committee to help with implementation of policies and programs. Belize advocated for involvement of men and more networking between governmental and non-governmental agencies, including faith-based organizations. Belize also introduced new programs which may serve as a prototype to other Caribbean countries, to strengthen broad-based Family Life Education programs for youth in primary and secondary schools. The report stated that the country envisioned young people to be the new generation of gender equality advocates (UN Women, 2015).

Apart from the CEDAW reports, progress is evidenced in women's national leadership in the political arena (Caribbean Elections, 2015). To date, the region has two current female prime ministers, leading the countries of Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago. The region has had two such female leaders in its recent past in Dominica and Guyana. There are currently also four female heads of state as governors-general in Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada and Saint Lucia, and three female opposition parliamentary leaders in Barbados, Saint Lucia and Turks and Caicos (Caribbean Elections, 2015). This should portend well for family-focused policies. But the same source points out that no gender-related difference has been found in how national policies are shaped. In other words, women leaders have not pushed a female agenda. There is no evidence either to suggest that they have pushed a family policy agenda

### **Conclusion**

Statistics on Family Violence in the Caribbean provide only a partial story about the prevalence or incidence. Numbers are attached to murders and severe cases of battery that can be directly linked to family violence, depending on how family has been defined or perceived by arresting officers, the prosecution or defense lawyers. Reports are scarce on the other human and social costs such as medical and health consequences and disabilities to victims as a result of family violence. Psychological costs are not measured for child victims, whether girls or boys,

and the duress under which women live when under the threat of spousal and relationship violence. Many pieces of legislation have been put in place to address the human rights objectives for women and girls and there has been observable and measurable progress in the fields of education, career paths and legal policies attempting to combat gender inequities that use to block women (CARICOM, 2007, 2011c; ILO/UNDP, 2009; OAS, 2012; St. Bernard, 2003; UNICEF, 2007). Progress is not as visible for rural girls and women or for indigenous populations and men and boys in rural populations have not made headway either. Inequities due to social class and ethnic oppressions still block access for many men, creating an atmosphere of tension that is being correlated in some circles with family violence, although this is an area open for research and dialogue. To date, evidence points to a reality that efforts to combat family violence have not been as successful even with model legislation being made available by the CARICOM secretariat to its member countries (CARICOM, 1997).

Combating family violence comes up against powerful cultural family constructs and internal and external conflicts about the meaning of violence within the bounds of households, primary relationships and intimate partners. Goals towards this end do not have as clear a path as with other gender inequities. The gender movement has stalled in this regard. Jamaica asked for expert guidance through their 2006 report to the CEDAW committee (UN Women, 2015). The Bahamas reported that it was tackling the challenge through a re-education of the youth and emphasizing the importance of family and of boys and girls accepting the challenge jointly (UN Women, 2015). The Bahamas is leading the way with renewed efforts and refreshed curriculum in Family Life education and in reframing 'gender' from being only associated with women's development, to include men and boys in the social development efforts towards combating family violence. The Caribbean as a whole is faced with challenges of delineating the boundaries of family, redefining family violence beyond domestic murders and battery, capturing prevalence and incidence of family violence in reporting and statistics at both the national and regional levels, and designing programs to create a social environment where family violence will be minimal. The gender movement is at a crossroads between goals that meet specific targets for women and girls, and goals that address the needs of family (Bogenschneider et al, 2006). Men must be included in these efforts, not just as the holders of power who decide whether or not to give access to women, but as members of families, husbands, fathers and partners who need to feel comfortable in their roles without resorting to violence to protect roles or problem-solve. Since women are resorting to violence as well, new dialogues must be started. Countries must be helped to figure out how to make sense of all the conventions and treaties in the name of gender advancement and carve out national and regional responses that address cultural norms and traditional patterns that do not fit with the new democracies of family. Assistance should be sought from family scholars to draw on their expertise on family issues to explore where the goals of international conventions intersect in the cause of eliminating family violence. Policy-making can begin to move away from just law-making to ensuring that expertly-guided programs are established in communities to meet objectives of a new agenda on family building and cultural re-education.

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