



ICPD IN ACTION *in the Caribbean*



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United Nations Launches Study on Violence against Children

The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, published in 2006, provides a global picture of violence against children and proposes recommendations to prevent and respond to this issue.

It provides information on the incidence of various types of violence against children within the family, schools, alternative care institutions and detention facilities, places where children work and communities.

In 2001, the United Nations commissioned an in-depth study on the question of violence against children in order to put forward recommendations for consideration by member States for appropriate action. This study is the first comprehensive global study conducted by the United Nations on all forms of violence against children which engaged directly and consistently with children.

No violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable. The study confirms that such violence exists in every country of the world, cutting across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin. It notes that in every region, in contradiction to human rights obligations and children's developmental needs, violence against children is socially approved, and is frequently legal and State-authorized.

The report was launched at the General Assembly in August 2006, with the aim of marking a turning point - an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as "tradition" or disguised as discipline.

The report indicates that although violence against children takes a variety of forms and is influenced by a wide range of factors, much violence against children remains hidden because of fear, societal acceptance and lack of reporting mechanisms. The emerging picture is one in which some violence is expected and isolated, and the majority of violent acts experienced by children are perpetrated by people who are part of their lives: parents, schoolmates, teachers, employers, boyfriends or girlfriends, spouses and partners.

The risk factors associated with this violence include economic development, status, age, sex, and gender, thereby increasing the susceptibility of children to violence.

It also, however, identifies other factors that may prevent, or reduce the likelihood of violence. These include:

- Stable family units involving good parenting;
- Development of strong attachment bonds between parents and children;
- Positive non-violent discipline;

- School-wide policies and curricula that support the development of non-violent and non-discriminatory attitudes and behaviours; and
- High levels of social cohesion.

Research also points to several factors that appear to facilitate resilience in children who have experienced violence.

continued on page 4

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editors	2
.....	
THE BARCAM	2
.....	
Special Report:	
Trends in Caribbean Youth and Adolescent Development Research	3
.....	
Text Box 1 -	
Youth and Crime: Jared's Story	5
.....	
Text Box 2 -	
The Caribbean Region's response to Violence against Children	6
.....	
Youth Declaration -	
Caribbean Regional Consultation; UN Study on Violence against Children	7
.....	
Youth Speak -	
Youth perspectives on violence	8

Research points to the fact that the high level of violence in the Caribbean region is related to a combination of extreme economic and social inequalities, the predominant culture of “machismo” which characterizes the region, as well as to the weaknesses in implementation of the existing legal protection mechanism.

In the region violence is the leading cause of death among males aged 15-24 years. Involvement in the drug trade and petty crime, access to small arms as well as poverty are important risk factors contributing to violence, while protective factors include positive relationships at school, access to livelihoods and close connections to family and/or community organizations.

In this issue we highlight the challenge of youth violence. This topic/theme has received international attention at the highest levels, including the commissioning of a global study by the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children. In the Caribbean region, the issue of young

people’s involvement in violence and criminal activity has been a major social policy concern for policy makers, civil society organizations and individuals. We have also looked at some trends in the limited research available, to see what has been done and what are some of the gaps. More importantly, we have decided to listen to the voices of youth as they seek to address this challenge – either through formal forums via declarations or as individuals who, because of their particular experiences, are able to point out some of the enabling factors.

By highlighting these articles, it is our hope that this publication will signal the challenge to each and everyone about the important role we can play against this threat to our countries’ development. ●

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THE BARCAM: Community-based Youth Using Theatre and Art to Reach Youth

The BARCAM is a word especially coined to mean: the struggle to uplift and unify mankind.

Founded in 1989 in Point Fortin, Trinidad, the membership, comprising a cohort of young artistes, performers and professionals, defines the organization as “a developmental organization, primarily involved in the execution of activities and programmes aimed at the development of youth, communities and corporate entities through participation, education, entrepreneurship, the environment, training, the promotion of culture and a variety of humanitarian endeavors”.

The group has devised a plan that allows the wider community to participate more effectively in youth development initiatives. Consequently, educative development theatre is what the group is best known for.

Educative Developmental Theatre workshops, one of the main methods utilized by the organization, is often used to address a number of social issues such



as HIV/AIDS, Health and Family Life Education, crime and substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment and teenage pregnancy.

By reaching their target audience wherever they may be, such as street corners, shopping malls, and sports grounds, the BARCAM is able, through street theatre, to establish a positive association with them through the facilitation of a process of bringing the concerns of the targeted audience with their natural environment, thereby allowing individuals to be comforted within their own space, while engaging their attention.

Although based in Trinidad, THE BARCAM has worked in over 12

Caribbean islands, trained over 1500 peer educators throughout the Caribbean region, and participated in exchanges in the United Kingdom, Malaysia and Africa. It has worked with developmental organizations such as United Nations agencies, CARICOM, the Commonwealth Secretariat and a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies. The BARCAM utilizes a methodology that is highly collaborative and participatory in nature. The approaches used by the organization serve as a catalyst for natural and spontaneous reactions, independent thinking and problem solving.

The Arts as a vehicle for development provides a base for THE BARCAM’s interventions. Mental and physical activity that engages the individual in improvisational and process-oriented experiences can be achieved. Interactive simulations are used to nurture and develop both individual and group skills, and to enhance participants’ abilities to communicate their ideas, images, and feelings in concert with others through dramatic action.

www.barcam.org

Trends in Caribbean Youth and Adolescent Development Research

Caribbean youth represent a crucial factor for achieving the objective of sustained and sustainable economic growth within a democratic context that guarantees a higher degree of equity and social integration. (Youth, Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean – Summary and Conclusions. ECLAC 2000)

It is estimated that there are over 8 million adolescents and youth living in the Caribbean region. Youth and adolescent issues have been on the agendas of Caribbean governments over the last decade, with most of them identifying youth as a target for social development. Demographic projections reveal a slow growth rate for youth populations. This is directly linked to the following factors: a rapidly aging population; high mortality rates among youth; and reproductive choices made by informed youth which directly affects family size.

Review of Research

Research on adolescent and youth in the Caribbean region is relatively new and has focused on needs and conditions of high risk youth, issues of crime and violence, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, underachievement and marginalization. There is limited empirical data analysis and evaluation of the situation of Caribbean youth to either underpin the programmes implemented or to inform policy directives.

There has also been extensive discourse in various forums about the predominance of risk factors that increase the likelihood of young people experiencing negative outcomes, and the need for increased protective factors which counterbalance the risk factors. Risk and protective factors exist on three levels:



Highlights

- *Increased recognition of the role that youth can play in the development process.*
- *Increased access for youth to education, training and ICT.*
- *Increased support through policies and institutional mechanisms (national youth policies and youth departments).*
- *Acknowledged importance of empirical research.*
- *Supported and implemented ongoing research in areas that are of critical concern – e.g. HIV/AIDS, violence and education.*

- The individual;
- The microenvironment (comprising the family, social networks, peers and role models, community and neighbourhood); and
- The macro environment (including mass media, economy, public institutions, cultural and historical background, and social norms on gender).

The discussion contends that there is an urgent need to strengthen the capacity of

young people and their support systems since there is escalating evidence of negative outcomes for youth in Caribbean societies. As far as the situation of young people is concerned, the data extracted from the research points to the following trends.

The studies point to a youthful Caribbean population, who are increasingly recognized for the role they can play in the development process. They speak of a youth population with increasing access to education and training and ICT supported by policies and institutional mechanisms (National Youth Policies and Youth Departments). The most up-to-date research tells us that parents, schools, peers and communities can make a big difference by providing certain conditions which make it more likely that young people will thrive. They have acknowledged the importance of empirical research and have supported and implemented ongoing research on areas that are of critical concern, example, HIV/AIDS, violence and education.

Implications of research findings are heartening as much as they relate to interventions, in that they have all mostly zeroed in on the need for limiting the risk factors and enhancing the protective factors, thereby supporting youth. Given the dearth of empirical data analysis and evaluation of most youth programmes, however, there is still a gap between understanding the needs and challenges faced by youth and how meeting these needs and addressing the challenges can lead to overall development in Caribbean societies.

Challenges

Available research revealed a number of challenges that were responsible for affecting the progress of young people within their respective societies and in the region as a whole. Among these were:

- Increasing high incidence of HIV and AIDS among adolescent and youth population;
- High incidence of sexual and physical abuse and exploitation;

continued on page 4

Principles Utilized in the Conduct of the Children and Violence Study

- No violence against children is justified. Children should never receive less protection than adults;
- All violence against children is preventable. States must invest in evidence-based policies and programmes to address factors that give rise to violence against children;
- States have the primary responsibility to uphold children's rights to protection and access to services, and to support families' capacity to provide children with care in a safe environment;
- States have the obligation to ensure accountability in every case of violence;
- The vulnerability of children to violence is linked to their age and evolving capacity. Some children, because of gender, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status, are particularly vulnerable;
- Children have the right to express their views, and to have these views taken into account in the implementation of policies and programmes.

Taken from World Report on Violence against Children.
Paulo Sergio Pinheiro.
United Nations 2006

These include secure attachment of the child to an adult family member, high levels of paternal care during childhood, a warm and supportive relationship with no abusive parents, as well as supportive relationships with peers who do not engage in substance abuse or criminal behaviour.

Although the report points to the availability of little information on the global economic costs of violence against children, in particular for the developing world, the variety of short- and long-term consequences associated with violence against children suggests that the economic costs to society are significant. The correlation between violence and the increased susceptibility of children to lifelong social, emotional and cognitive impairments as well as related mental health and social problems are well documented.

The report acknowledges some progress by United Nations member States in

tackling the issues of violence against children, specifically in the areas of legal reform; protection and penalties; formation of national action plans, programmes and policies, focusing mainly on sexual exploitation and trafficking of children; and advocacy, awareness and training in child rights and child protection.

The recommendations of the study apply to all efforts to prevent violence against children and to respond to it as it occurs, and specify recommendations which apply to the home and family, schools and other educational settings, institutions for care or detention; the workplace and the community. These recommendations are addressed primarily to States and refer to their legislative, administrative, judicial, policy-making, service delivery and institutional functions. Some recommendations are also directed at other sectors of society that are also of critical importance, including professional bodies, trade unions, civil society, parents and children. ●

continued from page 3

Trends in Caribbean Youth and Adolescent Development Research



SPECIAL REPORT

What's missing from the Research and Dialogue?

- The trend towards high mortality rates for lifestyle-related diseases;
- Increasing youth involvement in crime and violence as both victims and perpetrators;
- Existing high levels of unemployment and underemployment;
- Glaring gaps in services for adolescents, especially in sexual and reproductive health and rights issues;
- High-school drop out and illiteracy rates;
- Social exclusions. Situational analysis of Caribbean youth and adolescent population;
- Analyses of the underlying causes of the problems faced by youth;
- Analysis of the capacity of protective factors that exist to support young people;
- Youth participation;
 - Programmes for younger adolescents (10-14);
- Lack of rights-based approach to policy and programming;
- Lack of qualitative surveys that throw light upon young people, their characteristics, attitudes, experiences, behaviour and expectations resulting in data to inform interventions;
- Impact studies of various interventions that could be duplicated;
- Recognition of the cross-cutting nature of youth and the need for effective coordination in planning processes.

The principal challenge for all lies in ensuring the maximum utilization of young people's potential contribution toward achieving development goals. ●

Jared* was released from prison for the third time in eight years, two weeks after his 24th birthday. His story and experiences provides an insight into the world of a young man's involvement in a life of crime and violence

"I was going to a prestige school, you know, and then I was expelled in Form 3". He recounts his life growing up in a single parent household, not being able to communicate properly with his mom, because she was "struggling to survive, I didn't need to give her any additional pressure". He started skipping school and hanging out with friends he met at the bus terminal. "We used to go to the arcade, mall, and river or just ride up and down in the buses".

"Children, especially boys need a good household to grow up in, including a father"

He told how after having some problems with other boys at school, one day he took a cutlass to protect himself, it turned violent and he was suspended and eventually expelled. "The worst thing about being expelled from school is that my mom sent me to live with my father, who didn't even have a place of his own, since he used to live with whichever woman he was with at the time. I lived in five different areas, with five different families until I turned sixteen." He spoke of little supervision, whenever his father went off to work and the fact that he had to be out of the house on his own until night time when his father was expected to return." I had even less supervision, living with my father, I was free to roam the streets or do whatever I wanted".

His need for money led him to what he terms his only skill, pick pocketing. "I was trained for this you know. It was like a skill I had. My street name was Fingers." The thing about picking pocket was that to do it properly you

Youth and Crime

Jared's Story

had to do a couple of things: fit in with the crowd, and have two or three persons with you. Basically, you have to turn a ghost within a crowd". He recounted how he dressed as if going to work" in soft black pants" and his accomplices were "big women, who had children themselves and did it to pay their bills" He was eventually caught and because he lied about his age, was sent to prison for four months before a magistrate put him on probation and a bond. "I told the police that I was nineteen, when in fact I was only sixteen. They didn't even check it out. By the time my father found out I was on Remand Yard in big prison, it was almost four months". This first prison experience he said made him decide to learn a different skill. He got job with his family business, but left after a year when he had "disappointed them".

He lived on the streets, sleeping by friends and accomplices for over two years. During that time he said he graduated both in terms of his drug of choice (cigarettes to marijuana) and his crime (pick pocketing to the sale of drugs). "I needed more money, since I had more bills", he laughs "and my squad decided at that time to expand the business"

About his recent stint in prison he recounted bitterly that despite all the crimes he had committed over the years the one that actually got him five years in maximum security prison, was one he didn't even do. "I was set up you know, but I guess I had to pay for all my crimes somehow." He describes how initially he blamed everyone including the police, and his parents for being in jail.

When questioned as to where he

thought he would have been, if he did not spend all that time in jail, he tells of his plans. "I would of eventually either migrated or started a business to be on the higher end of the chain. Have you ever asked yourself when I picked all those pockets or robbed all these people what I did with the goods? The middle men in this business could get very rich. At the time I was working, gold sold for up to \$60 a gram."

"give me a chance, and stop treating me like a man who can never change, although I make a jail"

Jared did not want to volunteer much information about his prison experiences, stating "it was real bad, let's just say I was lucky". I enquired as to what would have made a difference in his life back then and now. His responses were: "Children, especially boys need a good household to grow up in, including a father. Just imagine I am a big man and I can't even play a sport. There was no one around to teach me things like that. Parents need to be more involved in their children's lives. My mom didn't even know what was going on with me daily. She thought I was going to a good school and did not stay out in the night, and that was good enough for her".

As to his plans for the future, he said he is trying to survive and keep out of trouble although it is a real struggle. And more importantly what will keep him out of trouble is "good family support, not going back into the same environment and finding something productive to do". Basically, his message to other young people is "you have to make up your mind to stay on the right path despite all the temptations out there". And to adults, "give me a chance, and stop treating me like a man who can never change, although I make a jail".

* Not his real name

A regional review of the scope of violence in the Caribbean region was conducted to inform the regional consultation on violence against children held in March 2005. This review covered all the member States of CARICOM, except Bahamas, plus three associate members.

While it was noted that these countries share similar historical and cultural backgrounds, including factors that are considered by many to underlie some of the violence that takes place, it was also revealed that in more recent times issues such as drug trafficking throughout the region, long-standing political rivalries and the unequal distribution of wealth, engendered violence as well as created a wider context in which violence occurs. The review also revealed that in this culture of violence, some of the perpetrators and victims of violent crime are male adolescents and young adults. Primarily, however, children and young people are the victims of violence.

What is being done to stop violence against Children?

A number of measures have been adopted at the level of policy and programme to alleviate this problem. This includes:

- The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by over 192 countries worldwide;

The Caribbean Region's response to Violence against Children

- Development of comprehensive national codes covering children's welfare;
- Mechanisms to report child abuse;
- Public education campaigns;
- National policies and strategic plans for especially vulnerable children, such as the disabled and those infected by HIV-AIDS;
- Initiatives aimed at supporting parents to raise their children without violence; examples are parenting education programmes; parenting initiatives that target fathers specifically and programmes that train early childhood teachers to work with parents, especially mothers of children under the age of three;
- Advocacy and awareness-raising programmes.

What are some of the gaps?

There is no doubt that all these efforts are promising, albeit limited in scope. It is important that they be properly analysed, and if they can be shown to have a positive impact, then they should be reproduced on a larger scale. However there are a number of gaps, including:

- Little evaluation of programmes to determine whether they are making a difference;
- Lack of services across the region for children who have been abused or neglected;
- Limited support for children and young people within the context of their own family;
- Urgent need for policies and programmes that support the family in a more general way;
- Limited programmes to address violence within institutions;
- Need to review legislation;
- Weak enforcement of laws;
- Need for up to date and reliable information on the problem.

This article was summarised from a report on the Caribbean Regional Consultation, "Violence against Children in the Countries of the Caribbean: The Problem, actions taken and challenges outstanding" written by Jane Kane for the Secretariat. United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children. 2006

The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of the most widely accepted human rights agreements adopted by the United Nations. It sets out the wide range of rights which should be enjoyed by all children throughout the world. The convention recognises the child as an individual with needs that change as the child matures. Accordingly, it seeks to balance the rights of the child with the rights and duties of parents and all those who have responsibility for children.

The four categories of rights under the Convention are:



DID YOU KNOW?

That the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) was approved on 20 November 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations and is the first legally binding universal code on the rights of children?

Survival Rights: these include those basic elements that support the right to life;

Development Rights: These include those elements that enhance the growth and development of each child;

Protection Rights: These rights cover protection from all forms of exploitation, cruelty, neglect and abuse;

Participation Rights: These promote the child's right to opinions and views.

All Caribbean member States are signatories to this Convention

Caribbean Regional Consultation; UN Study on Violence against Children
Declaration of the Children and Youth of the Caribbean

The following declaration was prepared and presented by the children and youth of the Caribbean who represented their counterparts from 14 countries at the Caribbean consultation for the United Nations study on violence against children in Port of Spain, Trinidad, March 2005.

We, the youth and children of the Caribbean realize that we are by products of our society and that given the proper encouragement and nourishment we have the potential to blossom into strong, beautiful and productive human beings – persons who can be true credits to their societies.

Violence is a harsh and daily reality for Caribbean youths, but it is not a reality which we will accept. Standing alone, either as a young person victimized by the proliferation of violence or as an individual nation reeling from its pandemic, our voices are not heard; but, in standing together as a unified Caribbean, as a unified body of young people, our voices can be, must be, will be heard. In bringing to light the many issues of children facing violence, we realize that our plight is part of a larger worldwide struggle for the realization of human rights. Our cry is not to be treated specifically, but rather, humanely in accordance with the core values of human dignity that are the cornerstone of the United Nations Declaration. As global citizens we demand to be acknowledged as first and not second-class citizens.

We accept that in order for change to occur we must first agree that there is solid ground for change. We must then diligently work to see this transformation through. Within our society persists the phenomena of the “visibly invisible”, every day we are cognizant of the challenges which face us: abuse, homelessness and exploitation of young people. Yet society diverts their eyes and shuts its heart, feeling that intervening is inappropriate in that they are powerless to do so. Society can do better! Every day we are exploited and used as proxies for the deviance and perversion of adults whose real duty is to shelter and positively influence us.

Caribbean youths need mentorship, not dictatorship, education, degradation, more encouragement, not more punishment

As youth leaders it is our responsibility to change the status quo, transforming the role of youth from that of victims to stewards of our peers, our brothers and our sisters. Indeed all stakeholders need to invest their energies and resources towards achieving this ideal.

Finally, we the young people of the Caribbean call on CARICOM, regional and governmental bodies to facilitate a follow up to this consultation which will ensure our views and expectations are well represented. ●

Publications on Youth Issues

2006

Investing Where it Counts generating the evidence base for policies and programmes for very young adolescents. Authors: Population Council, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS.

2006

Moving Young: State of the World Population 2006. Youth Supplement. UNFPA.

2006

Preventing HIV/AIDS in Young People: a systematic review of the evidence from developing countries. UNAIDS, UNFPA, WHO.

2006

Case for Investing in Young People: publication focuses on national efforts to reduce poverty and presents seven arguments for why national policy makers should give more attention to young people, if these efforts are to be successful. UNFPA.

2006

Gender, Health and Development in the Americas Authors: PAHO, UNFPA, UNIFEM

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YOUTH SPEAK

Youth perspectives on violence

The problem of young people's involvement in violence as perpetrators has challenged us all to find what are the causes and the solutions.

In our continuing search for answers we have thus asked a cross section of young persons, ages 10 - 24, what they think is responsible for youth's involvement in violence and what they suggest could be done to alleviate the problem.

Here are some of the responses.

Imani (14yrs): As far as violence in schools is concerned, I believe that some young persons are not treated well by their parents and as such they take out their frustrations on other students. Students need support such as counselling, and strategies to express themselves in positive ways.

Myles (12 yrs): I think a lot of young people are having family problems and they rebel by going with the wrong crowd. Government need to give more support to families and more activities for young people.

Mavron (17 yrs): A number of us are influenced by friends and to fit in with the crowd, we tend to do things that are seemingly popular. We need constant guidance and support from our families, and other adults, as well as activities to engage our attention and energy.

Keevin (22 yrs): Too much unemployment, so that they are angry, causing them to act violently. There is a need to create more employment opportunities for young people.

Amy (12 yrs): Many young persons do not live with their parents. Get them to talk about it and try to bring about some peace.

Tamara (18 yrs): A lot of young people are naturally rebellious. Add to this, pressure from parents and others in society to achieve, and of course, they act out. Parents need to be mindful of how they treat their children, and stop comparing their child with the neighbour or friend's children, and instead treat every child as an individual. They also need to always be aware of what their children are doing, where they are and who they are with, at all times, if possible.

Nikita (20 yrs): That's the only way that they know how to deal with certain situations. They are unable to sit down and reason. We need to renew their minds. Once they do that they will be able to handle things better.

Janessa (16 yrs): A number of factors including lack of education and understanding, no guidance in their home; wanting everything now and they don't want to earn it. Parents need to instil values and discipline at an early age in children. Need more programmes for youth.

Aaron (11yrs): Because they don't get proper training; people does lead them astray. They need to bring them to church.

Kashif (14 yrs): Bad influence including things on TV. Need for more youth groups to get them involved in different things.

Terry (24yrs): If young people don't have a proper skill to earn money, they will do what they need to get that money, especially those that don't have good family support. Make sure all persons have a skill, that they can get a decent job with and help parents to support their children. ●