



**G . e . n . d . e . r .**  
**DIALOGUE**

September 2002  
Issue No. 7

## *Attitudes to Domestic Violence in Dominica:*

### *Some research findings*

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In May 2001, the Bureau of Women's Affairs in Dominica undertook a survey on attitudes and experiences of domestic violence in Dominica for the purpose of informing the development of an integrated policy to eradicate this problem. Some 770 persons, both male and female, were interviewed. In addition, a number of focus group discussions were also held with service providers, with perpetrators and with community groups.

The data substantiate the view that domestic violence is a major problem affecting all strata of Dominican society. The research also corroborates previous research which showed that male-female relationships are characterised by antagonism and distrust, with financial matters being a major factor in domestic violence disputes.

The study found that both men and women experience abuse in relationships or are subjected to various forms of domestic violence but women suffer abuse to a greater extent and, more specifically, physical abuse. Men reported suffering emotional/verbal abuse in their relationships rather than the other forms of abuse. Physical abuse also seems more prevalent within long-term relationships - married or common-law.



The study shows that abuse in relationships affects both the younger and older

generation regardless of the type of relationship – married, visiting or common-law.

Although many persons are sensitive to the issue of domestic violence, a large proportion of the population, and more so men who come from abusive homes, believes that women behave in a manner that provokes the abusive behaviour of their partner. Many people also believe that men should have the final say on important decisions. These attitudes or opinions continue to reflect a picture of the traditional male dominating society.

Some of the major causes of domestic violence emerging from the research include poor communication, feelings of inadequacy, substance abuse, infidelity, lack or loss of self-control and uncaring attitudes. Women tended to identify infidelity as one of the causes of domestic violence or poor relationships, while men did not see this as a real cause for concern. The data also seem to suggest that abusive behaviour or acceptance of it was strongly related to a history of abuse. A large proportion of the victims or perpetrators experienced or witnessed abuse in the home as children.

Records of reported cases when compared to indicators of abuse in this study suggest that domestic violence often goes unreported. Even when it is reported, the survey reveals that the matter is often not pursued in court. Very few men reported abuse or sought help, expressing the view that they were “big enough to solve their own problems” or that the problem was not serious enough to warrant help.

About half the number of persons who sought help expressed dissatisfaction with the results. Some of the reasons cited for this include:

- (a) Little follow-up, especially by the police;
- (b) Improper evidence gathering by the police;
- (c) Ineffectiveness and/or breach of confidentiality by friends and relatives;
- (d) Loopholes in the law;
- (e) Lack of sensitivity resulting from the open court system; and
- (f) Lack of enforcement of child maintenance laws.

Many of these reasons are supported by the recent ECLAC/CDCC secretariat study “Evaluation of the Implementation of Domestic Violence Legislation”, which highlights domestic violence legislation as an important component in the elimination of gender-based violence in the home. It is important to note that although the 2001 Protection Against Domestic Violence Act is now in place, various mechanisms to facilitate its implementation are absent. There also seems to be weak institutional capacity within the various support systems to sufficiently deal with domestic violence in Dominica.

Recommendations arising out of this study include the need for the following:

- (a) Public education and training in areas such as conflict-resolution, domestic roles, personal relationships, and the understanding of human rights;
- (b) Implementation of existing legislation;
- (c) Improved government policy;
- (d) Further research into the phenomenon;
- (e) Improved support services;
- (f) The implementation of a male outreach programme;
- (g) Inclusion of the issue of domestic violence into the Health and Family Life School Curriculum;
- (h) Acquisition of parenting/life skills;
- (i) Implementation of gender-mainstreaming;
- (j) Economic empowerment for disadvantaged groups;
- (k) Consciousness-raising/sensitisation of law enforcers to the issues of domestic violence and its gender dimensions;
- (l) Training in gender and development for key stakeholders; and
- (m) Linkages between the government, civil society and the private sector need to be strengthened.

*This is an extract from the Report on Domestic Violence Research in Dominica. Prepared by the Women's Bureau, September 2002.*



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ECLAC, through the Women and Development Unit in Santiago, Chile, has undertaken the execution of the project “Capacity-building of national machineries for governance with gender perspective in Latin America and the Caribbean” in the framework of the actions taken by the United Nations through its development account.

The project arose in a context of structural changes and globalization in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. In the last decade, these changes have triggered the accelerated and massive access of women to the labor market, while they were also increasing their educational level. Nevertheless, gaps of quality and access persist in the midst of these areas of progress, where new inequities and challenges have also emerged. Among the most critical inequities, the gap in terms of participation in decision-making processes and political power stands out, as well as the inequitable alternatives left to women to reconcile their family life with citizenship demands - thus limiting their opportunities to develop their own capacities. ECLAC has advocated that this situation demands an integrated perspective which considers gender equity as a crucial element for achieving social equity, putting the emphasis on the cross-cutting nature of gender analysis and underlining the need to adopt a new systematic, multidisciplinary perspective in the design, execution, follow-up and evaluation of the programmes and policies aimed at promoting equality between men and women.

The ECLAC project which will be carried out in close collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the Division of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is to be executed from the year 2002 until 2004. It is planned that the

project will be implemented in 12 countries, four of which will be in the Caribbean.

The general objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of national machineries for the promotion of gender equity to integrate the demands and the needs of women in the national agendas of good governance and State reform.

The project is expected to strengthen the capacity of countries in the region to collect, analyze and apply knowledge, information and technical expertise to the formulation and implementation of public policies. The emphasis on capacity-building of national machineries for the advancement of women for the purpose of integrating women's demands and needs into national agendas for good governance and State reform. It is hoped to consolidate these achievements through the following measures:

- (a) Establishing a regional network of national machineries that shall disseminate information and experiences among the different levels of government, including the mapping of networks and existing institutional and social initiatives that are related with good governance in selected countries of Latin America;
- (b) Enhancing the capacity of existing national mechanisms following the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action;
- (c) Increasing the participation of women in decision-making organs, enabling the ascending presence of women and their advancement in the distinct official levels of executive, legislative, judicial and local administration bodies; and
- (d) Strengthening the mechanisms of support to women's organizations and networks of cooperation in civil society, in order to increase their influence and participation in the design, evaluation and follow-up of public policies at all levels of government.

**See ECLAC website: [www.eclac.cl/mujer](http://www.eclac.cl/mujer)**



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The ***Caribbean Feminisms Workshop: Recentering Caribbean Feminism*** was held at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill, Barbados, 17-18 June 2002, and hosted by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS), UWI, Cave Hill, in collaboration with the UWI, Faculty of Law, Cave Hill. The workshop was an attempt to help create a Caribbean feminist intellectual forum to formulate, debate, critique and disseminate new and ongoing ideas and knowledge about Caribbean feminist scholarship and its relevance to dissecting the multiple realities of women and men in Caribbean societies. Fifty-five women and men—most being academics, community-based activists or students—many located in Barbados and others travelling from The Bahamas, Jamaica, the Netherlands Antilles, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands, met over two days for dialogue and debate as Caribbean feminists.

### **The Idea**

Collectively as organisers, Dr. Eudine Barriteau, Michelle Rowley and myself, saw the Workshop as one way to place the feminist challenge of social and gender justice in the forefront of intellectual production and policy change in the region and generate new knowledge to benefit women's lives and Caribbean society. We believed that Caribbean feminist scholarship was poised at a critical juncture, having moved beyond stocktaking, number crunching and rendering of visibility long overdue, but ignored by earlier anthropological and sociological research of the mid-twentieth century Caribbean. We noted that by the end of the 1990s Caribbean feminist scholarship had matured. Yet Caribbean feminists in the region and

internationally whose field of study was metaphorically and literally the societies of the Caribbean only 'spoke' to each other through chance encounters at conferences and imagined conversations through their published works. We also recognised that between community-based feminist activists and feminists academics who often share similar goals, the distance was even more perceptible. Caribbean societies are experiencing rapid and profound political, economic, social and cultural change. We felt it was imperative that Caribbean feminists develop an intellectual space and community to collectively debate and theorize these developments.

### **The Workshop**

Over the course of the two days there were three main panels with twelve excellent and well received presentations on "Intersections of Class, Race and Ethnicity", "Caribbean Feminisms and the Nation State" and "Feminist Theorizing of Sexuality in the Caribbean" that invited enthusiastic discussions. The welcome address given by Dr. Barbara Bailey (in absentia), Regional Coordinator, CGDS, UWI, set the tone for the Workshop. She said the separation of theory and praxis was artificial and did not contribute to the informed resolution of many of the issues which women grapple with in a number of national, regional and international forums. She encouraged processes that facilitated the interface and integration. The keynote address on the first day was delivered by Dr. Eudine Barriteau, Head, CGDS, Cave Hill. She outlined some major challenges for Caribbean feminism(s). I will mention a few. She encouraged feminist scholarship and activism to maintain a commitment to interrogating and confronting the dynamics of power and to link adversities in women's lives to larger structures of oppression and exploitation. She pointed to the need to further interrogate class, race and ethnicity as feminist activists and thinkers. Dr. Barriteau vigorously urged a better understanding of the concept of 'gender' in Caribbean society and its feminist genealogy. She said:

*"Feminist theorizing gave birth to gender studies but this has grown rapidly into a well kept secret.... Now, there is a disconnect between feminist analysis, popular understandings of gender, and everyday life. An industry on gender has grown and it is very productive but it seems uninformed by the existing diverse body of Caribbean feminist scholarship."*



Dr. Sheila Rampersad in response to the keynote address challenged the concept of ‘recentering’ Caribbean feminism by pointing to its assumptions about a baseline or initial point of stability for Caribbean feminism. Who is an activist and who is an academic, she asked, and how are the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of these categories drawn. She also raised a question about intergenerational differences by asking whether younger feminists were as concerned with ‘power’ and relations of power as the older generation of feminists were. Together, the Keynote Address and the Response to it raised hard questions and crucial challenges about Caribbean feminism/s, and they excited intense and serious conversations and contestations.

The second day of the workshop started with a feature address by Jacqui Alexander, Fuller-Maathai Associate Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies, Connecticut College titled “Sexuality, the State and the Project of Nation-building”. She explored the dual move on the part of the State to promote some forms of sexuality and to suppress others. Pointing to the passage of sexual offences legislation in some Caribbean countries, she illustrated how the State legislates heterosexuality. Professor Alexander carefully unravelled law’s controlling and disciplining force, and its criminalisation of sexualities deigned to be deviant. Her talk set in motion fascinating conversations that could not be contained by the workshop.

### **The Product**

There are three areas where the dialogue over the two days produced important questions and reflections and, as would be expected, challenges, that I want to identify. First, the project of ‘recentering’ Caribbean feminism having been properly challenged, a set of questions that might be described as preliminary, arose. Who is a feminist and what is the feminist project? What are the different feminisms we think exist in the Caribbean? And related, how do we work through issues of race and ethnicity and class—power generally—within Caribbean feminism(s)? These questions were sustained and articulated in many different ways throughout the workshop. They are ones Caribbean feminists will continue to contend with: the place and work (worth too) of feminist scholarship and its relationship to a larger project of activism; the need to forge relationships of value between different generations of feminists in the Caribbean; and the importance of ensuring that our idea of the Caribbean is not of a map drawn around the English-speaking Caribbean and is one that captures us as transnationals. Jacqui

Alexander puts it this way: “Our challenge within oppositional movements is to invent home in different spaces that cross geography. We cannot afford to let the international be one sidedly pernicious.”

A final word about women’s organizations. There was a deep concern about the weakening of women’s organizations—the place and work of Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) was a recurring theme. Feminists urged themselves to develop new tools of organizing, saying that these should be participatory and focus on consciousness raising. Strategically, information and knowledge dissemination must be a vital part of feminist activism. The importance of reaching out to women not presently involved in work on and with women was highlighted. And the need to strengthen existing institutions was emphasised. In their work and thinking, feminist agendas in the Caribbean must make sense to a larger constituency of women, some offered.

While acknowledging our differences, the parting note was that these should not consume us. The need to honour what we share in common was firmly established. For me what we share is an awareness of how gender marks life and a belief that (and here I am borrowing from Mari Matsudu) every human being counts, each is entitled to flourish and a good life is struggling towards ending structures that deny those principles.



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At the meeting of experts of the Caribbean subregion convened by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) in Georgetown, Guyana, on June 20 and 21, 2002, participants reviewed the advances made in the implementation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem do Para). Participation was drawn from CIM's principal delegates in the Caribbean as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations working on violence against women.

The background document to the meeting focused on a regional analysis of national programmes in 10 Caribbean countries that had ratified the Belem do Para Convention. These countries are Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

The main achievements identified in the implementation of the Convention were:

- (a) **Establishment of institutional arrangements to eliminate Violence Against Women (VAW).** Through the provision of legal assistance, counselling, education, awareness promotion, shelters, hotline services, workshops /training, studies etc.;
- (b) **Development of legislation to address VAW.** To this end, some training is being offered to governmental agencies (e.g. police), national institutions (e.g. judiciary) etc., to secure their involvement in and support for the enforcement of legal measures to eliminate violence against women;
- (c) **Economic empowerment.** Linkages have been seen between women's vulnerability to violence and poverty. As a result, programmes related to economic empowerment of women are

being developed. These include employment generation and micro-enterprise support;

(d) **Services to victims and perpetrators;** and

(e) **Education and Awareness Building.** In almost all countries, advocacy is underway through such efforts as research, media monitoring, conferences, education etc., with a view to preventing VAW and promoting equality.

Some of the challenges to the implementation of the goals of the Convention include:

- Systemic gender inequality;
- Insufficient commitment on the part of the States to eradicating VAW;
- Resource scarcity;
- Inadequate data collection and research;
- Insufficient care and protection for victims of violence; and
- Insufficient education and training for victims, perpetrators and the society, as a whole.

In reflecting on both the gains and the continued challenges to eradicating violence against women in the Caribbean, the meeting participants made a number of recommendations, including:

(a) The need to ensure that the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women is fully complied with, with special attention paid to particularly vulnerable groups: victims of incest and rape; girls and women who are trafficked; street children; undocumented migrants; disabled women; sex workers and the aged;

(b) Action to address causation, including an examination of gender socialization practices in the home, community and the education system;

(c) The development of a coordinated approach to all forms of violence including the formulation of comprehensive and multifaceted action plans;

(d) The need to increase efforts to develop or strengthen corporate social responsibility and establish concrete partnerships and productive networks across sectors to maximize resources, including financial, human and political resources (private sector, entertainment industry, religious institutions);

(e) The importance of increasing technical help with which to improve national data collection mechanisms, particularly with a view to including gender-related data and the need to standardize the data collected, in order to ensure gender relevance;

- (f) Implementation of the domestic violence laws to ensure the full implementation of legislation, including enforcement of orders, as well as the review and reform of domestic violence legislation to make it more responsive to the economic needs of victims of violence;
- (g) Intervention with perpetrators prioritizing the safety of the victim and the community and ensuring that treatment does not necessarily take the place of punishment;
- (h) Special attention should be paid to adolescent sex offenders so that early intervention can be applied and rehabilitation achieved;
- (i) The establishing of programmes that focus on children, youth and young adults to build awareness and educate through schools, families, etc.;
- (j) Implementation of programmes to encourage healthy relationships and improve parenting skills;
- (k) Development of a strategy of outreach to media houses;
- (l) Development of protocols for health care services; and
- (m) The strengthening of partnerships and collaborative efforts between State and civil society actors in addressing and eradicating VAW.

Apart from specifying recommendations, the meeting identified regional priorities that could guide and inform inter-agency work and collaboration on violence against women. Chief among these was the need to build awareness by policy makers on the causes, consequences and costs of violence against women.

The current President of CIM and Principal Delegate from Guyana, Indranie Chandarpal, was nominated to be the CIM Focal Point for follow-up around the Belem do Para Convention. The meeting agreed that the Guyana delegate would coordinate and facilitate follow-up on behalf of the subregion.



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Introducing oneself is never an easy task, and to do it with a small paragraph doesn't make it easier. I joined the Social Affairs Unit of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean as a Social Affairs Officer in early July, after having worked for the Population Division at the United Nations Headquarters in New York for the last three years.

Prior to that I held a position with the UNFPA in Albania and also worked for the private sector in my home country, Germany. My academic background is Sociology and Demography. Luckily, my present job allows me to combine both fields. My main responsibilities here at the ECLAC office are the review of the implementation of the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) Programme of Action in the subregion, which will encompass collaboration with other actors in the field and advocating further implementation at the national and regional level. Specific topics, which are of particular concern to the Caribbean, like the general lack of sound demographic and social data as well as migration in particular, will keep me busy for the next couple of years.

Apart from work, I am raising my now five year old son as a single mother, which is not always an easy task. I enjoy being with good friends, and I like travelling. On the latter, I plan to do quite a bit to get to know better the Caribbean, the countries and their peoples. Last, but not least, if I have some time to myself, I enjoy reading and sports, like biking, running and

roller-blading. I am happy to be here in the Caribbean and I am looking forward to contribute to its advancement and prosperity.