



CIPRIANI COLLEGE OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN IN SOCIETY

Domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago is today recognized as a serious social-psychological problem. As a sociologist, I believed that cultural factors and the historical nature of patriarchy in the world may be able to explain the ecological variations in the levels of abusiveness that take place in the home environments. Sociologically speaking, it is not surprising that women have less power than men socially, economically, politically, and physically.

It can be argued that the underlying cause of violence against women lies in discrimination which denies women equality with men in all areas of life, and this is an historical reality. Violence is both rooted in discrimination and serves to reinforce that discrimination. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that “violence against women is a “manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men” and that “violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”.

It is, therefore no accident that men are almost always the ones who commit acts of domestic violence on women, even though we are seeing an increase of female violence against men in the household. There is an old saying, “Women and children and dogs first” which was meant to protect women and children on the *Titanic* and other capsized ships and crashed planes. This saying also applies to violent victimization by family members.

As we look around the world, violence against women is today a global phenomenon. Every year, millions of women are victims of violence, perpetrated by their intimate partners, relatives, friends, as well as strangers. It is also unfortunate that they have had violence perpetrated against them by those in authority, who they would otherwise look to for some degree of protection; these include employers, supervisors and colleagues, members of the protective services such as policemen, soldiers, prison officers, and of course private security officers.

Women, children, and men suffer from violence inflicted in the home, but the overwhelming majority of victims are women and girls, and unfortunately there seems to be not abating of this trend either internationally, or locally. It should also be noted that violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but is prevalent in every society in the world, cutting across boundaries of wealth, race, religion and culture.

Internationally, it is clear that the power structures within societies that perpetuate violence against women are deep-rooted and intransigent. This is worrisome as the majority of the productive sector in the world, particularly in developing countries, is dominated by females. The existence of this violence being perpetrated against them has negative effects on our

economies and productivity, as well as inhibiting women everywhere from fully exercising and enjoying their human rights, which we are mandated to protect.

Studies have shown that children who are exposed to violence between adults in their homes have often been referred to as the “silent,” “forgotten”, and “unintended” victims of domestic violence. These children are not simply “witnesses” or “observers,” but oftentimes suffer emotionally and psychologically, and studies have shown that the trauma affects their future behaviors and opinions towards violence. It is evident that experiencing the aftermath of violence is particularly traumatic for children, which usually manifests in increased emotions such as anxiety, depression, and stress.

Domestic violence harms the child’s emotional health and overall social adjustments, which usually manifests later in life, if not immediately. Another consequence of experiencing and witnessing violence within the home is the overall effects on the child’s immediate and long-term cognitive functioning; which studies show, can be seriously affected.

In conclusion, violence against women and children is an international problem that manifested in the society through anomalies associated with behaviours. While it is not being suggested that the majority of males partake in this reprehensible behavior, it is being suggested that the existence, maintenance and prevalence of domestic violence in society is directly related to the inequalities in power relations that are supported and reinforced by institutions in the social system. So to end this violence, one must first examine these institutions, and seek to address the deep-rooted power relations and inequalities that exist therein.

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