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THE SILENT PAIN OF COVID-19 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Globally, Covid-19 has impacted the socio-economic development of countries throughout the world. The impact has left some countries trying to navigate the pandemic, whilst attempting to preserve the livelihoods of their citizens. Several issues have disrupted and affected countries, which include problems due to extra demands on their healthcare, education, and economic sustainability, to name a few. One of the most controversial topics more recently facing Heads of State in countries worldwide, is that of vaccination policies, in particular vaccination mandates. This article focuses on the social matter of domestic violence during the pandemic. The level of domestic violence, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), has increased globally, but as it relates to Trinidad and Tobago, the Pan America Health Organization (PAHO) statistical review indicated an increase of 140% in cases of abuse amongst women and girls reported to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) in 2020 at the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, as compared to the same period in 2021 (PAHO 2021). Notwithstanding the introduction of the Gender-Based Unit and the amendment to the Domestic Violence Act during the pandemic, it is without a doubt that domestic violence is a national concern.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago implemented stay-at-home measures and curfews. Some of these measures, particularly as their implementation became protracted, resulted in persons losing their jobs or operating on reduced incomes, likely exposing men, women, and children to drastic increases in domestic violence. In some instances, the situation would have been escalated owing to intensified stress due to job losses or even other challenges associated with coping with other financial challenges. The writer

shares the view that the statistical review presented by various institutions for Trinidad and Tobago is not a true reflection of the prevalence of domestic violence in the country. According to the United Nations (UN), domestic violence, also called "domestic abuse" or "intimate partner violence", can be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or can include psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. Based on the scope of the definitions of abuse and domestic violence, the writer concludes that there is the possibility that there are numerous cases that go unreported, and as a result, the statistics presented to the public are merely a fraction of the prevalence of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

The writer believes that some abuse victims are unaware that they are being abused, as persons have a false notion that domestic abuse is only physical, and do not know that domestic abuse can be verbal, emotional, or even sexual. Consequently, there is likely a measure of under-reporting of abuse and domestic violence, that is related to the level of ignorance predominant in society, such that all forms of abuse and domestic violence are not even categorized or recognized as such, even by its victims. Other reasons why domestic abuse may be unreported include: financial dependency on the spouse or partner; embarrassment; lack of confidence in the justice system; children; family expectations; fear for their lives, that is, victims fear that they may be killed; and psychological damage.

The Government, through the TTPS, has implemented measures and bolstered its system by the introduction of the GBVU, increasing provision through Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) for counselling and consultation, as well as increasing phone hotline support to assist victims of domestic violence. Still, this writer believes that not enough is being done, and more

emphasis needs to be placed on helping the abuser. Covid-19 has brought so much silent pain to its victims, still, one is left to wonder if these abusers are not in pain as well, and the challenges encountered thus far during the pandemic may have resulted in increased abusive behaviour. This is supported by the American Journal of Emergency Medicine which indicated that the pandemic has intensified abusive behaviour and domestic violence.

The systems in effect by the TTPS are more geared towards helping the victims rather than the abusers. Some of the factors that influence persons who become abusers are childhood trauma, witness to domestic violence as a child, lack of communication skills, and the belief of always being in control and asserting dominance. Additionally, the learned behaviour of aggression and deviance plays a major part, which is purported by the social learning theory as a contributor to domestic abuse. In conclusion, the view is that we have failed and thus created abusers by allowing and enabling disrespectful and aggressive behaviour from our nation's youths. Now social media is even a greater influencer. Domestic violence is, without a doubt, a national concern. Still, it must be dealt with from the root of the problem, and communities all have a role in preventing abusive behaviour.

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