



## **CIPRIANI COLLEGE** OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

### **POVERTY SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND CRIME IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.**

Lately, there has been an intense debate revolving around schooling in Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps because we expect our schools to do so much for our children. One of the most visible school problems is the lack of discipline among then students and the prevalence of outright violence. For the past two decades, much public attention was directed to the problem of school violence, supported by many media accounts of children victimized at school by other children. As a sociologist, I have hypothesized that violence in the nation’s schools is intimately related to community factors that are frequently out of the control of school administrators, and this ultimately leads to higher level of aggression and violence among the student population.

I believe in an effort to maximize the safety of students and teachers, that public and private funds must be made available to schools to develop a plethora of programs to protect their premises and resolve conflicts with their walls, among both students and teachers. There has been a large amount of literature that supports the view that poverty has a strong connection to persistent violent offending; suggesting that children living under dire economic conditions are more likely to be victims as well as offenders of violence.

Preschool children living in low-income families characterized by poor housing, limited parental supervision and unemployment are at especially high risk of becoming delinquent and/or being victimized. Poverty in this context refers to a situation in which the basic resources to maintain an average standard of living within a specific geographical area are lacking. Having a low income affects people in different ways. For example, the values of different socio-economic, ethnic and cultural groups provide a cultural context wherein poverty is perceived differently. As a consequence, there are subgroups in society which may perceive material deprivation as being acceptable and even expected, as everyone else they see within the cultural context is in the “same boat.”

Poverty influences the family in many ways, not the least of which is the impact on parents’ behaviour towards children. The stress caused by poverty in urban settings is known to diminish parents’ capacity for supportive and consistent parenting; which may in turn, as it has been argued, create a coercive and highly aggressive method of child control. Parents that use aggressive and violent tactics are operant conditioning the child into a cycle of violence. It is important for us to note that the great majority of poor children and adults are law-abiding citizens and children, and adults and children from families of higher economic status do engage in delinquency and crime. This while it is being suggested that poverty has a correlation with deviant behavior, it is in no way being suggests that it is the only or determining factor.

The most sensitive area of the school violence debate has persistently remained as a political football for the last thirty years with ideologies centred on one’s socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Ethnic identity is an element of one’s self-concept and as such, corresponds to how

one's membership in an ethnic group contributes to one's identity. Ethnic identity conveys one's attachment to his/her ethnic group, indicating how positive and important group membership is to the individual and its cognitive and behavior development. Ethnic identity is fluid and can change with age or in response to situations, throughout the course of the individual's life.

The links between acculturation, ethnic identity and educational outcomes raise the question as to what underlies these associations. We consider the potential roles of self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotypes, because each reflects a core theme of social psychology by specifying how beliefs and expectations shape behavior and performance. These processes are relevant to Trinbagonians who individually and communally bring their own culturally influenced norms, attitudes, and behaviors embedded in the mainstream culture. Acculturation and ethnic identity could initiate or strengthen self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat.

I hypothesize that a self-fulfilling prophecy is linked to the social problems of modern society by virtue of it creating social inequality and decreasing the educational achievement of students in the lower socioeconomic strata.

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