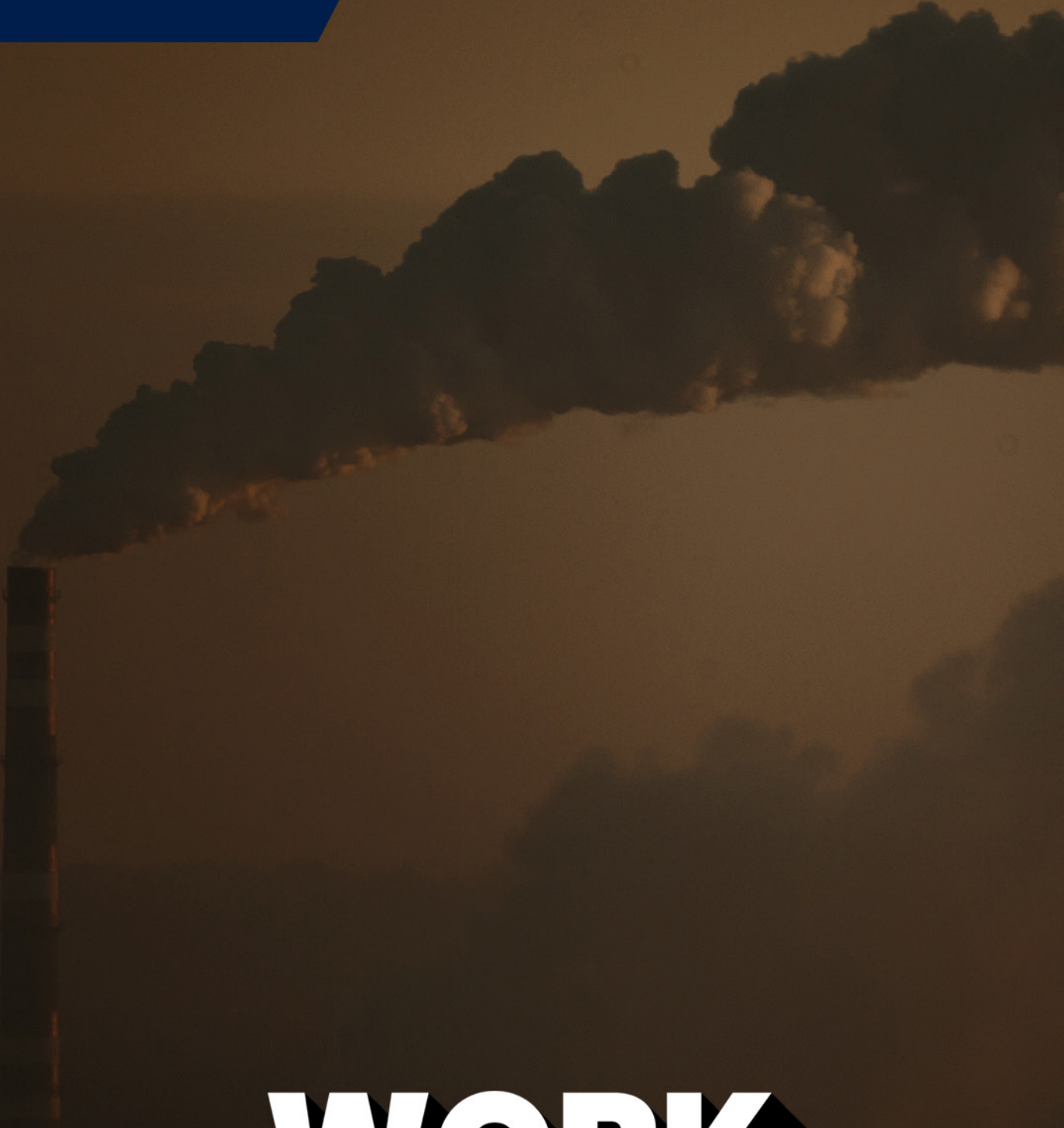




CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES



WORK MATTERS

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CRIME AND CLIMATE CHANGE

There is a long history of associating heat with violence. From Cicero (106–32 B.C.E.) to Montesquieu (1748). The link between aggressive behaviours and temperature has been observed. Climate change is likely to produce sociological, political, economic, and psychological changes that will increase the likelihood of violent behaviour. Research by Perry and Simpson (1987) reported rates of violent assault, rape and aggravated assault as significantly correlated with temperature. The first comprehensive review of the heat effect on violence found substantial consistency across many data sets, some as old as 1899.

Well-established bio-social-cognitive models of aggression and violence have discovered three ways in which climate change increases the relative frequency of aggressive and violent behaviour. Aggression is defined by most psychologists as behavior that is intended to harm another human who wishes to avoid that harm. Several aspects of this definition warrant additional attention. First, aggression is a behavior, not a wish, emotion, or thought. Second, the person enacting the behavior must believe that the behavior has some reasonable chance of harming the individual. Third, accidental harm such as tripping over an extension cord, slamming into another person, and incidental harm or pain caused by a dental procedure) are not aggressive, because the harm is not intended.

Aggression can take many forms, such as physically hitting a person, verbally calling person vile names, and intentionally spreading rumours about a person to harm their reputation. Violence is typically defined as physical aggression that is sufficiently severe to yield injury requiring medical attention. Most psychologists view aggression as existing along a continuum, with violence being reserved for the more serious forms of physical aggression. In other words, all violence is aggression, but not all aggression is violence.

Studies using an experimental paradigm to study the relationship between aggression and tempera-

ture have found that even the idea of heat will cause an increase in aggressive thoughts, participants with thoughts of heat make them more likely to have aggressive thoughts or to interpret neutral behaviour as aggressive. Other experiments have found that participants are more likely to be hostile, perceive others as hostile, and act more aggressively toward another person after being randomly assigned to sit in an uncomfortably hot room instead of a comfortable one.

One study manipulated temperature in a police training program. They found those police officers randomly assigned to an uncomfortably hot condition were more likely to respond to a burglary scenario by drawing their weapon and firing it than those in a comfortable-temperature condition. Although these experiments do not show the actual violent behaviour of shooting real people, they do provide an important understanding of the fundamental relation between aggression and temperature, and in this case, a link between heat and violence.

Researchers have identified the link between heat and aggression to compare violent crime rates across geographical regions that are similar in terms of nationality, socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics. Research in the USA has shown hotter cities have higher crime rates, even after statistically controlling for other variables that are sometimes associated with violent crime, such as poverty, age distribution, and unemployment. Although these other factors frequently have independent effects on violent behavior, some studies have found that they can also act as amplifiers for the effects of climate change aggression.

Global data has also been gathered to examine the relationship between heat and violence. One study gathered data from 60 different countries and concluded that temperature had an association with violence levels, especially in places already experiencing issues with conflict and instability. They concluded that for every degree Celsius increase due to climate change, there would be an increase in homicide rates

by 6%. Other estimates note that even mild increases in temperature of 1.1 °C could result in 25,000 more severe and deadly assaults per year in just the USA.

It has been forecasted that climate change will increase violence due to the effects of socio-economic group conflict. The process is associated with Piaget's child's moral development. Specifically, this is the idea that the likelihood of a child developing into a violence-prone adult will be increased by rapid climate change. The theoretical rationale is simple: known risk factors for a developing fetus or child eventually becoming a violence-prone adult will become more prevalent as a result of climate change-induced ecological disasters.

The Caribbean geographical and spatial location is naturally prone to tropical storms and hurricanes, sea level rise and severe flooding of coastal communities, water shortages in drinking and agriculture, and changing suitability of local agricultural practices for efficient production of food. For example, each of the following is a known risk factor for creating violence-prone adults: growing up in poverty, inadequate prenatal and childhood nutrition, dysfunctional families and parenting-disrupted families, and exposure to neighbourhood violence.

The reader is invited to consider how much climate change-induced ecological disasters will increase the percentage of children who are exposed to multiple known risk factors for adulthood violence. Exposure to war and conflicts, low education, and poor living conditions are affected by human-induced climate change.

From past experiences with natural disasters, we, as members of civilized societies, should be able to prepare for future disasters by creating policies and plans, setting aside emergency resources and funds, and actively and quickly coming to the aid of Caribbean people in need.

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