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**Summary of Proceedings**

**Public Hearing**

Held on Wednesday, July 10, 2019

[10:21 a.m. to 12:01 p.m.]

**3<sup>rd</sup> Public hearing re: An inquiry into the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and the state's capacity to minimise the occurrence of teenage pregnancy and provide services and assistance to teenage parents.**

**Venue:** J. Hamilton Meeting Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, The Port-of-Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

**Committee members**

The following committee members were present:

1. Mr. Paul Richards – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
3. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
5. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
6. Ms. Allyson West
7. Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP

**Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration**  
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,  
Community Development, and other Social Services)

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**Witnesses who appeared**

The following officials were present:

Child Welfare League

1. Ms. Cheryl Ann Guy - Centre Manager
2. Mrs. Cheryl Alleyne-Ross - Regional Coordinator

Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists

1. Ms. Anna Maria Mora - Counselling Psychologist/Author

Single Fathers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago

1. Mr. Rhondall Feeles - President

**Key Issues Discussed**

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Child Welfare League

- i. The CHOICES programme was established in 1994 as a support service for teenage mothers, pregnant teenagers and teenagers at risk of becoming pregnant.
- ii. The main objectives of the programme are to:
  - a) facilitate the reintegration of teenage mothers into the education system and wider society; and
  - b) assist teenage mothers in postponing further child bearing until they achieve physical, emotional and financial maturity.
- iii. Teenage fathers are not involved in the programme, given that the girls are generally reluctant to divulge their identities.
- iv. Three core areas of instruction are provided to the teenage mothers: academic subjects, vocational studies and health and family life education (HFLE).
- v. The sexual and reproductive health education provided by the League may not be followed by some girls due to the social and economic circumstances of their homes.
- vi. Funding is a major challenge to the sustainability of the CHOICES programme.

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- vii. Approximately 1,200 teenage girls and their families have participated in CHOICES since establishment.
- viii. On average, the teenage mothers remain in the programme for 6 – 9 months.
- ix. Approximately 3% of girls who have participated in the programme have had a second pregnancy.
- x. Girls who become pregnant for a second time are not allowed to re-enter the programme.
- xi. Girls are referred by the Ministry of Education (MoE) while the Ministry of Health (MoH) provides assistance in delivering counselling and HFLE to the girls.
- xii. Formerly, the CWL coordinated an outreach programme, the Adolescent Mothers Programme, in primary schools to help prepare students to transition successfully into secondary school.
- xiii. The Adolescent Mothers Programme was terminated in 2016 following the introduction of a similar programme by the MoE.
- xiv. There is a need for more attention to be directed to teenage fathers given that some have children with multiple girls.
- xv. The CWL currently does not collaborate with the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists (TTAP) or the Single Fathers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SFATT).
- xvi. The CWL collaborates with faith-based organizations in delivering its services.<sup>1</sup>

Issues discussed with the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists

- i. Teenage pregnancies are usually unplanned. Consequently, teenage parents often experience psychological disorders in the form of anxiety, insomnia, depression, self-esteem issues and loneliness together with other social challenges.
- ii. In many school districts, data does not accurately reflect a correlation between the number of girls attending school and teenage pregnancy.
- iii. According to enquiries done in one school district, 75 girls aged 14 to 17 years dropped out of school due to pregnancy during the 2018/2019 academic year to date.

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<sup>1</sup> This was also expressed by the TTAP and the SFATT.

## **Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration**

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- iv. The need to work with males and allow them to understand the responsibilities of fatherhood and manhood.
- v. There is a need to sensitize girls about the importance of disclosing the identities of the boys/men who impregnated them.<sup>2</sup>
- vi. There is a need for Social Workers to frequently visit and monitor homes in at-risk communities.
- vii. There is a need to provide community-based centres which can provide supervision and allow children to engage in positive social activities outside of school hours.
- viii. The Mariama Centre was established by Ms. Anna Maria Mora in 1990 and offers sexual and reproductive health education alongside social activities for adolescents.
- ix. The TTAP has repeatedly advocated for the establishment of a National Psychological Trauma Centre which can provide services for victims of sexual abuse, among other traumas.

### Issues discussed with the Single Fathers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago

- i. There is a lack of statistical information related to single fathers, in contrast with the availability of information about teenage pregnancy.
- ii. The SFATT is a member of the Central Education Multisector Committee (CEMC) alongside Ministries, state entities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)<sup>3</sup>.
- iii. The CEMC initiated an empowerment caravan in 5 schools in the Central region between 2017-2018 which focused on teenage parenthood, responsible sexual practices and deviant behaviours including sexual misconduct, gang involvement etc.
- iv. In September 2019, the second phase of the caravan will be delivered to groups of students who are at-risk of the aforementioned issues within the same 5 schools.
- v. And evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme will be conducted upon its completion.
- vi. There are plans to extend the CEMC model and caravan to all police districts.

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<sup>2</sup> This was also expressed by the CWL.

<sup>3</sup> These include the Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Children's Authority, National Family Services, NIHERST, Children's Court, Two Cents Movement.

## **Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration**

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- vii. With regard to advocacy for teenage fatherhood, there is a lack of resources and willingness by the State. In addition, NGOs have shortcomings in harnessing and gathering statistics.
- viii. The SFATT's membership is primarily composed of adult fathers aged 25 to 65 years. There are few members who are teenage fathers.
- ix. Prior to the decriminalization of sexual activity among minors, mothers of teenage fathers sought assistance from the SFATT when their sons were prosecuted for such activity.
- x. In the future, the SFATT intends to engage the Legal Aid representatives of the CEMC to assist boys who commit sexual offences in schools.
- xi. There is a need to provide greater support to teenage fathers. Teenage fathers also experience social consequences related to teenage pregnancy.
- xii. It is important to deliver sex and reproductive health education in Primary and Secondary schools to sensitize students about pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and other issues.<sup>4</sup>
- xiii. The SFATT advocates against media advertisements that promote negative sexual attitudes and behaviours such as infidelity.
- xiv. Single fathers are less likely to receive custody of their children compared to single mothers. According to the Association, only 2% of custody matters in the courts result in shared custody.

### **View the Hearing**

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n9qdQ5oRA0>

### **Contact the Committee's Secretary**

jscspa@tpparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2283

*Committees Unit*

*July 31, 2019*

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<sup>4</sup> This was also expressed by the TTAP and the CWL.