



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on Wednesday May 25, 2022 from 10:15 a.m. to 12:21 p.m.

Subject matter: An inquiry into the State's capacity to provide support for victims of Domestic Violence and Family Conflicts (with specific focus on the availability of support mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic)

Venue: Virtual via the Zoom platform

Committee Members

The following Committee Members were present:

- Mr. Paul Richards
- Mrs. Penelope Beckles, MP
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan
- Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP
- Mr. David Nakhid

The following Committee Members were excused:

- Mr. Roger Munroe, MP
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
- Mr. Avinash Singh

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials appeared before the Committee:

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)

- Ms. Jacqueline Johnson Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Kathleen Sarkar Asst. Director, National Family Services Division

- Ms. Cindy Heeralal Coordinator, Non-Governmental Organisation

Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs Division (OPM-GCA)

- Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Gaietry Pargass Senior Legal Advisor
- Mrs. Anne-Marie Quammie-Alleyne Coordinator, National Policy on Gender & Development
- Assistant Coordinator, National Domestic Shelters

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT)

- Mrs. Sharon Morris-Cummings Director Ag.
- Mrs. Rhonda Gregoire-Roopchan Deputy Director, Care Services
- Ms. Elizabeth Lewis Deputy Director Ag., Legal & Regulatory Services

Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS)

- Mr. McDonald Jacob Commissioner of Police Ag.
- Mrs. Sharon Gomez-Cooper Asst. Commissioner of Police, Criminal Division
- Mrs. Claire Guy-Alleyne Superintendent, Gender-Based Violence & Child Protection Unit
- Ms. Aisha Corbie Manager, Victim & Witness Support Unit

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with **Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS)**:

Overview

- i. For the period March 2019 to March 2022, there were 6250 domestic violence reports received by the TTPS of which 4921 were females and 1333 were males.
- ii. There was a noticeable increase in the number of persons reporting domestic violence during the period March 2019 to March 2022.
- iii. The formation of the GBVU provided increased avenues for persons to report domestic violence cases.

Breach of Protect Orders

- iv. No study was taken by the TTPS to determine the number of Protection Order which protected the victims from their perpetrators however there are instances in which the Protection Order curtailed the actions of the perpetrator.

- v. The victim, perpetrator and the station are apprised of the conditions of the protection order and receive copies of the Order.
- vi. In the event of the violation of a Protection Order occurs the victim notifies the TTPS and gives the power to arrest the perpetrator.
- vii. The charges for a perpetrator under the Domestic Violence Act only occurs when there is a violation of the Protection Order or the Bail conditions.

Key Observations

- viii. The challenge of obtaining a medical for the investigation of domestic violence cases in a timely manner as medicals may take up to three weeks.
- ix. According to the TTPS, the increase in numbers of domestic violence report include the following factors:
 - a. cases of assault between dating couples are now recorded as a charge of domestic violence due the amendments to the Act;
 - b. Sensitisation sessions on the reporting procedure for domestic violence; and
 - c. The restriction of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- x. The need to inform the public via media conferences, on the amendments to legislation which will affect the recording of types of cases reported to the TTPS.
- xi. The multi –sectoral approach of the TTPS to sensitising the public and students on domestic violence.
- xii. The TTPS’ process to ensure the confidentiality of the information received from the victim.
- xiii. Unauthorised breach of confidentiality for the information received by the victims can be subject to disciplinary procedures.
- xiv. The TTPS utilises the definitions provided in legislation to differentiate corporal punishment from child abuse when a parent is chastising a child.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with **Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs Division) (OPM-GCA)**:

Overview

- i. The OPM-GCA in conjunction with UN Women are working towards the continued implementation of the phase I and the implementation of phase II of the spotlight initiative on domestic violence.
- ii. The parameters used by the OPM to differentiate corporal punishment from child abuse when a parent is chastising a child.
- iii. A multi-sectoral taskforce has been formed to discuss the gaps and the actions taken to remedy the gaps identified from the report on children homes presented by the OPM.

Shelters

- iv. There is currently one shelter operated and fully funded by the OPM-GCA while two shelters are funded by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.
- v. The shelters for male victims of domestic violence is scheduled to be fully operationalised by the end of 2022.
- vi. There is no restrictions on the age or gender of children allowed to stay at the one shelter run operated by the Government.
- vii. The Government operated shelter includes several psycho-social and reintegration programmes for the victims and their children housed at the shelter.
- viii. There are restrictions on the age limits of children are some privately operated shelters.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with **the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)**:

Key Observations

- i. According to the MSDFS domestic violence is a learnt behaviour and the Ministry intends to treat with domestic violence holistically as a family issue via their parenting programme and their programmes in partnership with other agencies.
- ii. The MSDFS intends to establish a the vulnerability registry which aims to identify all the households in Trinidad in terms of their vulnerability status, and will be based on the reports of domestic violence or vulnerability cases from the TTPS, the OPM, the Ministry of Education and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and state agencies.
- iii. The MSDFS is in the process of recruiting persons to fill the vacancies in their Units and the recruitment is projected to be completed by the end of fiscal 2022.
- iv. The Parenting programme is currently operating virtually but will soon return to face-to-face within communities by end of fiscal 2022.
- v. The services at the National Family Services Division are available 24hrs a day.
- vi. All the NGOs in receipt of subventions under the purview of the MSDFS has received their quarterly subventions for 2022 once they are in compliance with the requirements of the MSDFS.
- vii. The MSDFS' NGO Unit is currently collaborating with NGOs to improve the Governance and reporting processes NGOs under their remit and in receipt of subventions.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with **the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT)**:

Key Observations

- i. There are currently four care centres operated by the CATT.
- ii. The need for additional funding for CATT to increase resources to treat with reported cases of child abuse and to allocate to care centres and the foster care programme within Trinidad and Tobago.

- iii. The CATT is currently auditing the security and monitoring mechanisms at the care centres and addressing other systemic issues.
- iv. TTPS assisting the CATT with the review of their security systems at the care centres.
- v. The OPM has provided assistance to the CATT to identify persons who are victims of drug use and drug abuse.
- vi. The CATT collaborates with the TTPS to determine the level of risks to the child once a report of domestic violence is received by the CATT.
- vii. The CATT's Emergency Response Unit aims to investigate and mitigate risk to a child within 24hours of receiving the report and determining that the child is in imminent danger.
- viii. The CATT treats child perpetrators of domestic abuse firstly, as a child and subsequently takes steps to provide intervention programmes to both the victim and the perpetrator to determine the cause for the behaviour of the perpetrator.
- ix. There has been no preliminary measures at care centres to remove alleged perpetrators of the child abuse as identified in the 'Jones Report'.
- x. The CATT's procedures require that the TTPS be contacted should children escape while in the care centres or in the custody of the Authority.
- xi. There are currently four psychologists at the CATT who provide intervention treatment to children in the cases reported to the Authority.
- xii. The current case load ratio for case managers at the CATT is 1:100 cases.

This public hearing can be viewed on demand via our YouTube Channel or accessed from the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5kob9b8pQk&list=PL-SY0ndJDfa5LAYQn79awq-7kflN3BqX6&index=10>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

June 13, 2022.