



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing (second hearing)

Held on **Wednesday June 22, 2022** from **10:15 a.m. to 12:22p.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
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
- Mr. David Nakhid
- Ms. Penelope Beckles, MP
- Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP
- Mr. Avinash Singh

The following Committee Members were/ excused:

- Mr. Roger Munroe, MP
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of **The Alliance for State Action to End Gender-based Violence (ASA)** appeared:

- Ms. Roberta Clarke- President, Coalition Against Domestic Violence;
- Dr. Gabrielle Hosein- Representative, Institute for Gender and Development Studies;
- Ms. Asiya Mohammed- Founder and Executive Director, Conflict Women Ltd;
- Ms. Safiyyah Acosta- Outreach Coordinator, WOMANTRA.

The following officials of **The Center for Nonviolence, Research, and Development** appeared:

- Mrs. Sherna Alexander-Benjamin- Anti-Violence, Social Protection, and Human Economy Consultant;
- Ms. Asha Garib- Clinical Psychologist;
- Ms. Chimere Gibson Wadi- Attorney at Law.

The following officials of the **Trinidad Shelter for Battered Women and Children (TSBWC)** appeared:

- Mr. Collin Mitchell-Chairman;
- Ms. Sherron Harford- Vice Chairman.

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Alliance for State Action to End Gender-based Violence (ASA)**:

Overview of the Coalition of Member Organisations of ASA

- i. ASA is a network of organisations working to end gender-based violence that monitors the activities of State agencies and advocates for greater State accountability.
- ii. ASA believes that the State has a non-negotiable obligation to provide sufficient support to address the causes and consequences of gender-based violence. This includes the ongoing leadership to engage state institutions and agencies to effectively address matters of constitutional, legal and human rights and resources necessary to discharge this obligation.
- iii. The Government and its agencies have been engaged in legislative actions and several initiatives to address GBV, often in conjunction with relevant NGOs over the last three decades.
- iv. While these initiatives are commendable, the State needs to undertake further initiatives that are sufficient to adequately and efficiently address the scale of the challenges and the scope of problems related to the causes and consequences of GBV.
- v. ASA has submitted a draft strategic action plan to end gender-based and sexual violence addressing these matters aimed at influencing the development of more comprehensive policies on GBV.
- vi. According to ASA, this document was reviewed by Cabinet in 2016.

Reporting and Data

- vii. Incidents of violence against women are severely under-reported, especially to state agencies.
- viii. Recording of reports is very deficient, which frustrates the ability of response mechanisms to facilitate timely and effective support services.
- ix. There is inadequate sharing of data among response sites, hence a lack of consistent data necessary to adequately assess and address the true scope of problems during the pandemic.
- x. Statistics on domestic violence differ among the major reporting agencies such as the TTPS, 800-SAVE and the Child Protection Unit.
- xi. However, it has been noted that there was a general increase in domestic violence, economic challenges and displacement of victims.
- xii. For the period March 2020- March 2022, TTPS received more than 6,000 reports of domestic violence compared to March 2018 to March 2020, where there were 2,710 reports of domestic violence.
- xiii. ASA cannot necessarily make a determination of whether there was an increase in instances of domestic violence or simply an increase in reporting as there was the development of the TTPS App, which made it easier to report domestic violence.

- xiv. Data from the Trinidad and Tobago Central Registry highlighted that:
 - a. from January to October 2020, over 4,500 calls were made representing an increase of 119 per cent in calls received when compared to the same period for the previous year; and
 - b. from January to August 2020, there were over 1,000 reports received which represented a 55 per cent increase when compared to the same period for the previous year.
- xv. The 2018 Women’s Health Survey, which was the first national prevalence survey conducted in Trinidad and Tobago, stated that one in three women report violence—physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.
- xvi. The data also suggested that in the 12-month period prior to the study being published, the number was significantly higher.
- xvii. The study also showed that of the women who experienced violence, only 7 per cent report to the police and 2 per cent or less report to state agencies.

Services

- xviii. A range of support services were provided online during the pandemic, with varying degrees of effectiveness. However, legal aid services were severely constrained.
- xix. Women and girls form the great majority of victims. However, equitable support needs to be provided to men and boys who are victims.

Financial and Administrative Priorities

- xx. There needs to be greater transparency regarding how financial allocations are made toward supporting GBV initiatives.
- xxi. Tracking the impact of financial allocations and assessing gender equity in distribution of grants is paramount.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Centre for Non-violent Research and Development**

Overview

- i. The State needs to share its power to create equitable access to supporting resources for people experiencing domestic violence.
- ii. The state needs to provide bridging social capital and sustainable resources to prevent violence, protect people experiencing violence and to hold perpetrators accountable.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Trinidad Shelter for Battered Women and Children (TSBWC)**:

Overview

- i. The shelter was established in 1987 and offers a multiplicity of services essential to the support of women and children.
- ii. TSBWC is significantly constrained by the ongoing challenge of severe financial deficiency.
- iii. Services offered include medical care, therapeutic counselling, school placement for the children, skill set training, legal support and assistance with housing. We offer many more.
- iv. There were no shelters for domestic violence victims in Tobago. However, the THA has recently allocated a property for this purpose.

Summary of Major Common Issues

- v. Member entities of the coalition that serve the population of victims of domestic violence perform different but complementary functions. They face some similar and some unique challenges. There are fundamental issues that relate to their success in addressing the realities of domestic violence, including causes and consequences.
- vi. Domestic violence is a complex matter and its consequences are severe. Addressing both causes and consequences require a multifaceted approach with appropriate resources designed and managed to enable and facilitate effective, sustainable intervention programmes. These include:
 - A multidisciplinary team of experts, including social psychologists and other human services professionals with expertise suitable to conduct appropriate research to inform the design and management of enhanced intervention programmes.
 - Development of comprehensive education and targeted communication programmes to tackle cultural issues that fuel the causes and resist the mitigation of domestic violence.
 - Programmes must be developed and implemented to educate and sensitise specific population sectors, including cohorts among early childhood groups, adolescents and young adults as a means of effecting changes in values and awareness leading to significant reduction in domestic violence.
 - The overall management of intervention programmes which are designed for improved effectiveness should include ongoing impact assessment.
 - Accelerated review of the dormant 2016 Draft Strategic Action Plan and its recommendations to inform policies and programmes of intervention.

- Urgent review of the financial requirements to sustain effective programme implementation; and significant improvement in state financial allocations for programme support.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOnOIJU4g1w&list=PL-SY0ndJDfa5LAYQn79awq-7kflN3BqX6&index=11>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

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