



Eliminating Violence Against Women And Girls In Barbados

Information for the Universal Periodic Review Committee regarding the 29th Session from Life In Leggings: Caribbean Alliance Against Gender-based Violence Through Education, Empowerment & Community Outreach.

Introduction: This report is based on a review of information compiled and submitted by various Barbadian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who work to address gender-based violence and violence against women.

Life in Leggings works directly with members of civil society as it relates to advocacy and research.

Lack Of Access To Justice:

The state report does not mention that one of the most common practices in Barbados is the way that the law and enforcers of said law treat underage girls as criminals when trying to escape abusive situations. Studies show that when girls are constantly running away from home they are trying to escape an abusive situation at home. What usually happens is that the girl has more than likely exhausted all forms of reporting the abuse to no avail and is only left with the option to leave home when the abuser is present only to return when another adult is present or when the abuser leaves. In quite a number of cases, the girl eventually runs away and falls prey to an adult who promises to take care of the child or to become their 'protector' and may end up in yet another abusive situation.

The girl is then reported missing by the parent/guardian, the police issues a missing person's bulletin and the child is eventually found only to be returned to the abusive situation or worse remanded to a prison for underage girls charged with "wandering" or "loitering" instead of counselling and access to justice. (See: <https://www.barbadostoday.bb/2016/02/23/school-girls-held>)

Girls are often mistreated in these institutions by their peers (see: <http://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/96877/help-teen>) or further abused by their caretakers. After their time has run out, due to being abandoned by their parents (see: <http://www.bahadostoday.bb/2013/05/10/dodds-girls>) and they've not been properly rehabilitated some girls are leaving the institution to become sex workers. (See: <http://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/77294/gis-sex-workers>)

Activists and concerned members of civil society have called for proper investigations into the Government Industrial School for girls as there have been independent investigations that unearthed some girls are leaving without the necessary life skills to support themselves after leaving making them dependent and more likely to be caught in another abusive situation. (see: <http://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/88817/gis-called-hellhole-helping>)

Legislative Framework:

There is currently a back log in the courts and as a result women and girls are often revictimized when called years later to recount the very experiences that they've spent years trying to forget. (see: <http://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/91642/sex-offence-court>)Cases are at a risk of being thrown out if the victim cannot remember specific details that relate to her attack. (See: <https://stluciatimes.com/2016/12/06/bahadostoday-sexual-assault-trials-hit-delays>)We ask that Barbados implements a sexual offense court in an effort to deal separately with these issues to provide access of justice and to prevent perpetrators from not being prosecuted. At present judge are appealing for this necessary implementation (See: <https://www.bahadostoday.bb/2016/03/22/judges-appeal/>)

We hope the Universal Periodic Review Committee will raise the issue of violence against women and girls where it affects women based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender expression, sexual identity, immigration status, economic status and disability in its list of issues and subsequent examination of Barbados. In particular, we hope the Committee will:

In it's list of issues, ask Barbados what progress has been made to the sexual harassment bill and when will it be established as it has been years in the making. What reform will be done to the Government Industrial School and how will abused girls be given access to justice. What rehabilitation, counselling and empowerment programs will be implemented. What punishments will be dealt to officers or adults who refuse to report/record domestic or sexual abuse of underage girls.

In it's concluding observations on the state party report, recommend that Barbados (as advised by the None In Three Project- see: <http://www.noneinthree.org/docs/21-Lessons.pdf>) increase education and public awareness programmes that explain the multiple forms of domestic abuse and the links between these.

Train professionals to identify potential indicators of domestic violence which are to be supported by managers in proactive intervention.

Therapeutic and empowerment-based approaches for women should provide opportunities to address early childhood experiences of abuse. Interventions targeted to children subject to abuse should recognise the importance of these experiences for future behaviours and relationship choices and build resilience-enhancing capacity into their programmes.

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Therapeutic, escape and support interventions for victims need to take account of the continuum and multiplicity of forms of abuse.

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By the time a report is made to the police or the situation brought to the attention of a person in authority, women are likely to have exhausted all other options for dealing with the problem and the violence may have escalated to a dangerous level. Professionals must recognise that their response at this point is crucial and all cases of domestic violence brought to their attention should be considered as urgent until and unless this is proven not to be the case. Reports made to the police should be followed by periodic visits to the woman where there is a strong likelihood of ongoing risk.

There is a clear need for stronger multi-agency working and strategies that help women escape violence and over the longer term, support women in addressing the ways in which abuse has eroded agency and self-esteem.

Given the prevalence of family and community violence, early childhood and primary school curricula should include a focus on children's mental health and wellbeing which addresses the internalisation of exposure to violence and negative gender attitudes.

A combined approach to policy on domestic violence, policy on poverty reduction and policy on gender equality is necessary to address women's economic dependency as a factor that traps women in violent relationships.

Civil society organisations, education institutions and churches all have a role to play in providing education programmes which aim to challenge cultural/gender stereotypes that promote expectations (from both men and women) that the man, as the provider is dominant and the female is subservient, in favour of gender roles that are more equal.

There is a need for the police to work with other government and civil society organisations to develop strategies for keeping women safe after they have left a violent partner. Where violence has been long-standing, it may not come to an end because of a conviction or court order. In the small communities of the Caribbean, this therefore means that extra vigilance and support is needed.

We hope the Universal Periodic Review Committee reinforces the following recommendations:

Constitutional and Legislative Framework

Define the crime of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the legislation

Adopt legal measures to punish domestic violence

Accelerate the adoption of Employment Sexual Harassment Bill

Domestic Violence:

Implement recommendations made by the national reform committee tasked with reviewing the Domestic Violence Protection orders Act, continue to develop a National Action Plan on Domestic Violence, train police on domestic violence issues and seek to expedite criminal trials, where appropriate

Address the gaps in the legislation on domestic violence identified by the committee established by the Bureau of Gender Affairs.

Gradually form special police intervention units with the inclusion of female personnel qualified in handling domestic violence cases.

Implement the recommendations of the reform committee established by the Bureau of Gender Affairs, including the inclusion of a gender sensitive and victim-centered approach in the legislation.

Devote more resources to the protection of women and children from domestic violence and any other kind of abuses.

Liberty and Security

Establish a mechanism for collecting and evaluating data on incidents of domestic violence and sexual harassment so as to assist the Government in tackling violence against women.

Violence Against Women:

Consider formulating and implementing national policies on gender to help define and coordinate efforts to tackle discrimination, marginalization and violence against women

Continue efforts to combat gender stereotyping and gender inequality across the board and work towards empowerment of women in all spheres of society, including addressing sexual harassment in the work place.

Continue to enhance its domestic framework to eliminate violence against women and to promote gender equality

Consider establishing a national plan of action to prevent sexual violence against children and women.

Brief report prepared by Life In Leggings: Caribbean Alliance Against Gender-based Violence Through Education, Empowerment & Community Outreach.