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Missing and Exploited Children in Jamaica: An Empirical Analysis

Cover Page Footnote

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Missing and Exploited Children in Jamaica: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of missing, abused, and exploited children in Jamaica. I examined the responses of advocate groups and the government to determine the steps to take to protect children who are most vulnerable. I collected data through interviews from the Police National Intelligence Bureau, the Office of the Children's Registry, the Office of Children Advocate, literature review, and the printed media (e.g., The Jamaica Gleaner, The Jamaica Observer, and The Jamaica Star).

Keywords: victimization of children, exploitation of children, child abuse, child labor, Child Care and protection Act, Convention on the Rights of the Child

Victimization of children is a worldwide phenomenon, despite the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that was adopted by 70 Heads of Government over half a century ago, transforming the ways in which children are perceived globally. The Convention emphasizes that every child under the age of 18 should be: (a) afforded the right to survival; (b) able to develop to the fullest; (c) offered protection from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation; and (d) able to participate fully in family, culture, and social life. The core principles underpinning the Convention are: (a) non-discrimination; (b) devotion to the best interests of the child; (c) the right to life, survival, and development; and (d) respect for the view of the child. In addition, the Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal civil and social services (Convention on the Right of the Child, 1989).

These rights mean that Jamaican children should be treated as equally as children worldwide. However, it was not until 1991 that the Rights of the Child were ratified in Jamaica. This became a reality after much advocacy by the Jamaican Coalition on the Rights of the Child, with support from six other non-government organizations. This revolutionized approach brought a paradigm shift on how Jamaican children should be treated, as Jamaica instituted a number of legislations, public policies, and institutions that would better serve the welfare of children. To ensure compliance, a national plan of action and programs was implemented. Included in the national plan was the passing of legislation such as the Early Childhood Commission Act of 2003, which focused on the administration of early childhood, education, and development. This act was succeeded by the passing of the 2005 Early Childhood Act, which prescribed the regulatory powers of the Commission and set

standards for all early childhood institutes. The Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 created one piece of legislation that outlined universal standards for the care and treatment of children. Another legislative act was the Trafficking in Person Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment Act of 2007, which was enacted to prohibit all forms of trafficking in persons, including women and children, and related offenses.

To further ensure compliance, numerous policies and plans were created to fulfill the World Fit for Children Commitments. Among the policies and programs introduced were: (a) the National Youth Policy of 1994, which was the first comprehensive policy on youth, addressing education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, health care, youth participation and empowerment, and care and protection (this policy was updated in 2004 and is currently under review); (b) the Poverty Eradication Policy of 1995, which included a social investment fund and a social safety net program to be administered through a program of advancement through health and education; (c) the National Policy on Children, which ensures the right of every child to the attainment of quality education, health care, and justice; (d) the National Plan of Action for Children of 1995-2002, which aimed at providing an institutional framework to address and enforce children's rights; (e) the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Children made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS of 2003-2006, which was in response to the needs of the National Plan of Action for Children (it sought to improve the quality of life for children in Jamaica made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS); (f) the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence, which is a multifaceted approach to reducing violence against children; (g) the National Plan on Child Justice of 2008, which addressed a number of issues regarding how children in conflict with the law are treated; (h) the Social Investment for Children Initiative of 2006, which sought to increase the level of social investment for children; and (i) a national Parenting Policy of 2008, focused on parenting practices nationwide. Other initiatives to

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further benefit children included child-specific National Human Rights Institutions, the Institution of a Juvenile Unit in the Police Force, and a Victim Support Unit in the Ministry of National Security to assist child victims of violence.

Special institutions and agencies were created in support of the national plan, including: (a) the appointment of a Special Envoy for Children of 1998, with primary responsibility to influence the development of policies concerning the welfare of children. However, this position no longer exists; (b) the formation of the Child Development Agency, which has responsibility for children in need of care and protection (the agency was created to achieve the holistic development of children through the creation, implementation, coordination, and regulation of programs and policies that meet Jamaica's obligation to international standards for children); (c) the establishment of the Office of the Children's Advocate in 2006, to protect and enforce the rights of Jamaican children and promote their best interest, and (d) the implementation of the Children's Registry in 2007, which receives, records, and stores reports of all types of reported abuse, abandonment, and neglect (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2005; the Office of the Children's Advocate & UNICEF, 2009; Witter, 2009).

Table 1.

Number of Children between Ages 0 and 17 Years Reported Missing for the Period January 1, 2006 to October 31, 2010

| Year/Reported | Males missing | Males returned home | Females missing | Females returned home | Total number of missing persons |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2006 | 43 | 16 - 37% | 24 | 10 - 42% | 67 |
| 2007 | 6 | 3 - 50% | 12 | 5-45% | 18 |
| 2008 | 612 | 184 - 30% | 1,046 | 324 - 31% | 1,658 |
| 2009 | 484 | 194 - 40% | 1,286 | 553 - 43% | 1,770 |
| 2010 (Jan-Oct) | 321 | 125 - 39% | 1,036 | 1,036 - 35% | 1,357 |
| Total | 1,466 | 622 - 42% | 3,404 | 1,255 - 37% | 4,870 |

Source: Jamaica Police National Intelligence Bureau, November 2010 (JPNIB, personal communication, November 17, 2010).

Numerous reasons have been posited as to why children go missing, including poverty, poor economic circumstances, family conflict, mental illness, financial difficulties, abuse (physical, verbal, sexual) from immediate family members and step-parents, fear of being reprimanded or punished, becoming lost, abductions, kidnappings, or death. The Missing Persons Desk of the Jamaica Police National Intelligence Bureau has provided a myriad of reasons for the vast number of missing children aged 0 to 17. Chief among them include: (a) kidnapping for ransom; (b) child abuse (verbal or physically); (c) mental or neurological conditions or severe depression; (d) running away from home or going off with friends and not informing parents, guardians, or relatives; (e) killed and not identified; (f) ingesting and trafficking of narcotics overseas; (g) displacement resulting from human trafficking; (h) desire to become involved in criminal activities, especially teenage boys who want to join gangs; (i) pregnancy; (j) parental pressure; (k) peer pressure; and (l) incarceration (JPNIB, personal communication, November 17, 2010).

The locality from which children go missing varies (e.g., school, bus stops, home), which has sent waves of panic across

the nation causing parents, teachers, and prospective victims to take extra precautionary measures. Extra security and surveillance strategies were placed in several localities. For example, some schools increased their security, while others suspended extracurricular activities and encouraged students to go home at the end of the school day (Jamaica Gleaner, 2008e).

Missing Children

Children have accounted for the greatest percentage of missing persons in Jamaica for the last 5 years. For the period January 1, 2006, to October 31 2010, a total of 4,870 children were forwarded to the Missing Person Call Centre (Jamaica Police National Intelligence Bureau [JPNIB], personal communication, November 17, 2010). This is frightening and disturbing and has raised a number of questions. Statistics derived from the Missing Person Call Centre at the National Intelligence Bureau indicate an annual increase in the number of missing children between 2006 and 2010 (JPNIB, personal communication, November 17, 2010). Table 1 illustrates the gravity of the situation. It is noteworthy that children account for the greatest percentage of missing persons.

Parents, guardians, and relatives are often blamed for their high level of irresponsibility in reporting their children missing. According to officers at the Jamaica Police National Intelligence Bureau (personal communication, November 17, 2010), children go to relatives' house and the relatives do not inform the parents. It is only when the missing person report is publicized in the media that the child is discovered. Responses from a series of interviews revealed that the majority of the children who go missing are taken by strangers, family members, and friends of the family. However, there are others who leave home of their own free will due to abuse, economic reasons, social problems, mental health challenges, and drug trafficking (Jamaica Police National Intelligence Bureau 2010). Interviews further revealed that mothers, particular those in some inner cities, send away their girls to other communities

with the hope of protecting them from the dons in the communities who prey on them for sexual favors. In protecting their innocence, mothers report their daughters as missing.

Anthropologist Herbert Gayle (2007), in offering an explanation on the phenomenon of missing children, focused on a four-stage system that starts with feuding among community members and ends with abduction and rape. He argued that the first stage of the process starts with single murders, followed by geo-serial murders, which occur in areas occupied by war-ringing factions, and multiple murders. He also maintained that gangs are usually responsible for a number of these murders in an effort to outdo their rivals. The final stage, according to Gayle, is "When people are in a feud, in order to create a 'trigger' they need to take out people who are outside the game of feud. This includes women, children, and the elderly. The more graphic it is, the more 'respect' you earn" (as cited in Jamaica Star, 2008a, "Four-Stage System," para. 2). In this final stage, women and children may be abducted, raped, and disposed of in an effort to show one faction's dominance over the other to support their false sense of control (Jamaica Star).

The fear of children going missing has sent ripples through out the religious community, which interprets it as having "supernatural undertones" (Jamaica Star, 2008a, "Supernatural Influences," para. 1). Pastor John-Mark Barnett of the Pentecostal Tabernacle church in Kingston said:

There is something sinister about what is happening. These people are not being held for money, these women and children are being raped and killed. I am wondering if there is something particularly devilish about this. Sex plays a role in Satanic worship rituals and I am beginning to think that this is a possible cause for so many abductions. (Jamaica Star, 2008a, "Supernatural Influences," para. 2)

Regardless of the reasons given for disappearances, there are also criminal, civil, and psychological implications. Rand (1997a) noted that abducting or kidnapping of children is a criminal as well as a civil offense. Furthermore, Rand believes that children who have been psychologically violated and mal-treated through the act of abduction are more likely to exhibit a variety of psychological and social inadequacies which make them vulnerable to detrimental outside influences. Researchers suggest that in most cases, victims of abduction suffer from adverse psychological effects. According to Binder et al. (2008), these victims often suffer from symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (e.g., nightmares, flashbacks, and frightening thoughts), which may impede their developmental progress. Additionally, children may suffer from psychotic effects that may include Stockholm syndrome, where victims begin to feel loyal to their abductor as a coping mechanism (Binder et al.).

Based on reports, it is obvious that the majority of children abducted in 2009 are from impoverished communities (as cited in Reid, 2009a), although reports from the Planning Institute of Jamaica (2008) indicate an upward movement in Jamaica's poverty line and a decrease in the number of people going hungry. However, there is still a high correlation between missing children and poverty levels, because the children who go missing are mostly from communities where poverty is at its highest, despite the statistics showing the prevalence of poverty dropped from 18.7% in 2000 to 9.9% in 2007 (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008). In addition, it was indicated that the

prevalence of food poverty fell from 4.9% to 2.8% during the same period. Despite these findings, there are areas where poverty is still very high (Planning Institute of Jamaica).

Robertson (as cited in Reid, 2009a) argued that children from working-class homes are the most vulnerable in the missing dilemma, due of breakdown of the family unit. Many of the homes have single parents (chiefly mothers), unlike their upper middle-class and upper-class counterparts. He believes that these families lack the financial means to implement security mechanisms, such as dropping off or picking up their children from school, security surveillance at home, and electronic or technological devices to communicate with their families. He further alluded that financial straits in the homes of lower middle class homes often result in parents sending the children out on the streets to sell *quick-cash* items in a desperate bid to supplement the family's already meager disposable income (as cited in Reid). Having children unsupervised makes them more vulnerable to being abducted or going missing.

Although the number of missing children has increased annually, a new pattern was observed in 2009. According to the Jamaican police, children from upscale communities and predominantly wealthy Jamaican families were abducted, where monetary reward had to be exchanged to gain their freedom (Reid, 2009b; Brown-Daniels, 2010). Highlighted in the report from the police were incidents of human trafficking of children from rural communities to urban and metropolitan areas in Jamaica (Jamaica Star, 2007b). In October 2007, police attached to the Centre for the Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA) charged three persons who were allegedly involved in a human-trafficking ring (Jamaica Star). Five other persons were charged with the trafficking of a child, under the Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 (Jamaica Gleaner, 2008). This practice has serious implication for children, considering the growth of human trafficking globally. Already an estimated 50,000 women and children in the Caribbean region have been victims of human trafficking (Jamaica Gleaner), which is prohibited under international law. The Human Rights Report, Jamaica (2008) reported that Jamaicans who are victims of human trafficking are usually poor women and girls (sometimes boys). They are trafficked from rural to urban and tourist areas for commercial sexual exploitation. It was also reported that these individuals are typically recruited by family members or newspaper advertisements promoting work as spa attendants, masseuses, or dancers, who after being recruited are coerced into prostitution. Some victims are subjected to conditions of forced labor as domestic servants, while others are invited to live with families, go to school, and get an informal education in order to avoid exposure to the public (Human Rights Report, Jamaica).

Abused Children

Table 2 shows the Office of the Children's Registry reported that there were over 15,600 cases of child abuse reported between 2007 and 2010.

Although cases are reported as abuse, a number of the cases are categorized as neglect (i.e., child left unsupervised, deprived of food and clean/adequate clothing, and attended school dirty/unpresentable without the basic necessities). Indication is

Table 2.
*Number of Child Abuse Cases Reported for the Period
 January 1, 2007 to April 2010*

| Year/Reported | Number of abuse cases | Total |
|----------------|-----------------------|--------|
| 2007 | 460 | 460 |
| 2008 | 4,100 | 4,100 |
| 2009 | 6,100 | 6,100 |
| 2010 (Jan-Oct) | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Total | 15,660 | 15,660 |

Source: *Jamaica Gleaner (2010b)*.

there were 7,000 cases of neglect between 2007 and 2010 (Jamaica Observer, 2010c). According to the Office of the Children's Registry (OCR, 2010), despite the increase in the number of abuse cases, a more significant number of incidents go unreported. This was blamed on the *informer fi dead* culture, where persons who have information are reluctant to report out of fear for their lives, so many children silently suffering from abuse and are afraid to speak out (Jamaica Star, 2010b).

The Jamaica Gleaner (2010c) documented Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mark Shields' view that originally, when cases of child abuse were reported, not many arrests were made. This is because abuse is one of the hardest offenses to investigate as there are usually two witnesses, the abuser and the abused. Jamaica Gleaner also reported that child abuse cases were investigated by the Community Relation arm of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), instead of treated under the serious crime portfolio. However, the enactment of the Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 charged adults with the legal responsibility of reporting child abuse. Failing to report known cases or suspicion that a child is abused or in need of care and protection could result in 6 months in prison or a fine of \$500,000. Additionally, the new law increased the maximum sentence for incest to 16 years imprisonment and separated children from parents who were found guilty of harming them (Child Care & Protection Act, 2004).

Child abuse, in general, is a worrying factor in Jamaica, but additionally there is evidence of increases in sexual abuse/carnal abuse cases (incest to carnal abuse), along with physical and emotional abuse. The latest crime statistics indicate a 5% increase in carnal abuse cases (Jamaica Gleaner, 2010d). For the period of January through September 2010, 384 children were sexually assaulted, compared to 365 over the same period in 2009 (Jamaica Gleaner, 2010d). The Jamaica Gleaner (2008a) documented Rainford's (consulting obstetrician and gynecologist) findings that adolescent sexual offenders are teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17, which data suggests are usually male family members of the abusers. Furthermore, abusers engaged in illegal sexual behavior, including intercourse, or acts such as obscene telephone calls. He found that the abusers were more likely to be male than female, while the victims were more likely to be females. While the cause of this behavior is unknown, research indicates that children who were physically abused were more likely to exhibit this behavior. According to the Jamaica Gleaner, Rainford further identified alcohol or other drug abuse, family difficulties,

a history of sexual abuse, and exposure to pornographic material as factors associated with this type of abuse. He believed that victims of sexual abuse were more likely to become promiscuous and engage in thoughtless sexual acts, and the younger that a girl started having consensual sex, the more likely that she had been forced to have sex in the first instance (Jamaica Gleaner).

Although the figures regarding sexual abuse cases are revealing, a vast number go uninvestigated due to lack of reporting. In a number of situations, underage girls who get pregnant are fearful for their lives if the father of their child is revealed. The police see this as a challenge to investigations. Little-White (2008) posited that child sexual abusers are in different localities (inside and outside the home), and are typically men, although some women sexually abuse children for their own sexual gratification, or initiate young boys into sexual intercourse. Nonetheless, due to cultural practices (e.g., the culture of silence), most cases of sexual abuse of boys by women are not reported to the police and, in some instances, are condoned by society which sees it as a badge of honor for the boy even though he is under the age of consent. According to Little-White, in most instances the abusers may be the father (rare instances of a mother), step-father, sibling, or a relative, such as an uncle or cousin. A case prosecuted in the St. Catherine Circuit Court, which saw a 48-year-old uncle plead guilty to impregnating his 12-year-old niece (Jamaica Star, 2009), supported Little-White's arguments.

In Jamaica, like many other countries, it is illegal for anyone to have sex with a girl who is under the age of 16. Little-White (2008) noted that child sex abusers get their victim to comply with them by grooming them with attention, affection and gifts of money and other treats. She further posited that abusers may even groom the mother or caregiver of the child in order to win the family's trust and gain access to the child. According to Little-White, the child may develop affection for the abuser and become subjected to repeated acts of sexual abuse, and out of fear choose not to disclose the experience.

Several convictions in 2010 resulted from numerous incidents of sexual abuse and rape. For example, *Zebra*, a popular dance hall deejay, was sentenced to 30 years of hard labor on carnal and buggery charges (Jamaica Observer, 2011). In another case, a 31-year-old security guard (who posed as a taxi driver to lure his victims) was found guilty for raping a 12-year-old girl and a 22-year-old woman on separate occasions. He was convicted on two charges of rape and illegal possession of a firearm and was sentenced to a total of 52 years in prison (Jamaica Observer).

The problem of sexual abuse has negatively impacted the health sector. Of great concern to practitioners in the medical profession, limited hospital resources are overstretched, resulting from the high percentage of 12 to 16 year olds who are sexually abused and become pregnant. Under the Jamaican law, sexual encounters with females under the age of 16 attract a jail term of 6 years (The Child Care and Protection Act, 2004), but often law enforcement faces difficulties in arresting those involved. In support of this law, the Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 introduced additional penalties, which range from a maximum fine of JA\$500,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment

if someone is knowledgeable of, or suspects, child abuse and fails to report it to the Office of the Children's Registry.

Although the sexual exploitation of children has put Jamaica in a negative light, this practice is also a significant problem regionally and internationally. Child pornography, juvenile prostitution, child sex tourism, and trafficking of children for sexual purposes have taken on a greater dimension over the last 2 decades. According to Estes and Weiner (2002), these behaviors have been fueled by several factors including:

(a) existing adult prostitution rings in communities where children live; (b) children going missing from home; (c) prior history of child sexual abuse and child sexual assault; (d) poverty; (e) unattached transient males in communities; (f) girl membership in gangs; (g) the promotion of juvenile prostitution by parents, older siblings, and boyfriends; (h) the recruitment of children by organized crime units for prostitution; and (i) illegal trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

Increased incidents of physical abuse are also a concern. Abuse is frequently perpetuated against children in their homes, which includes physical punishments administered as discipline, especially by mothers. However, in Jamaica the cultural practice of physically punishing children for reasons such as disobedience, disrespect, stealing, lying, answering back, fighting, and poor homework is not considered physical abuse, because it occurs in the context of disciplining the child. Some parents even threaten to murder their children without considering it as abuse.

Who are the Perpetrators of Missing and Abused Children?

Perpetrators of missing children are not only strangers. Often family members and friends are also implicated. For example, a Jamaica Observer article titled *Cabbie charged with abduction, rape 12-y-o girl*:

The taxi driver who allegedly abducted and raped a 12-year-old girl, then buried her alive after he thought he had strangled her to death, was yesterday remanded in custody when he appeared before the Corporate Area Resident Magistrate's Court. The accused, 26-year-old Garsha Wilson, is charged with rape, abduction, attempted murder, malicious destruction of property, and cruelty to a child. The police alleged that the child -- who was reported missing from the transport centre in Half-Way-Tree, St Andrew on March 22 -- was abducted by Wilson, said to be a family friend. It is alleged that Wilson took the child to Smokey Vale, St Andrew where he raped her and choked her until she was unconscious. The accused, believing that the child was dead, reportedly buried her in shallow grave and covered it with stones. The girl regained consciousness and dug herself out and was assisted by residents who took her to the police where the matter was reported. Wilson, who had reportedly accompanied the mother to report the child missing, fled the scene after he heard that she was found. He was arrested 3 days later. (Jamaica Observer, 2010b, para. 1-7)

In identifying the perpetrators of child abuse, a common thread that runs through a number of studies shows that culprits are often parents, especially mothers. Research conducted by anthropologist Gayle in 2004 (Jamaica Observer, 2005a), noted that the number one abuser is the mother, followed by female teachers. Not only are parents abusers, but parents aid in the

speedy trial of other perpetrators by not making their children available to court at the trial out of fear of reprisal, pay-off by offenders, and not wanting to be exposed to public embarrassment. The research shows that parents abuse their children for a number of reasons, including economic gain. The Jamaica Gleaner (2009a) highlighted an exclusive story about three of four sisters who have taken their father to court for years of alleged sexual abuse. Some of the incidents date back more than 4 decades.

Although parents are often involved in the abuse of their children, other family members, relatives, caregivers, strangers, and influential persons (e.g., teachers, bus drivers, conductors, and taxi operators) are featured in numerous incidents. For example, an article in the Jamaica Gleaner (2005), titled *Teacher on carnal abuse rap granted bail*, featured the story of a 29-year-old teacher who was arrested and charged for carnally abusing one of his students, but released on \$1 million bail. The student was hospitalized with hemorrhaging.

Despite school teacher involvement in sexual harassment of students, little is done to deter this behavior by the school system. For example, in one parish a male teacher who was brought before the court for allegedly fondling a female student was back at school. The principal noted that, "He was on leave, but he came back (September 1). We don't have any authority to tell him to come off the compound; the board would have to meet and get directives from the ministry," (Jamaica observer, 2005b, para. 3).

Reid, (as cited in Jamaica Gleaner, 2011a), quoting Cargill research officer in the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) noted that:

In the school system where teachers are hired and disciplined by a school board, the employment contracts of educators who are accused of child sexual abuse are sometimes terminated by the board without the tutor being convicted. As a result of the gaps in the system, such a teacher can then seek employment in other schools, and the cycle of abuse continues. ("Most Cases Still Pending," para. 3-4)

Another incident involved the arrest of a 38-year-old woman and her 43-year-old partner for aiding and abetting the carnal abuse of their 12-year-old daughter (Jamaica Star, 2007a). This couple from the parish of St. Elizabeth was charged with aiding and abetting the carnal abuse and exposure of a juvenile to moral danger, after allegedly swapping their 12-year-old daughter for a piece of land (Jamaica Star, 2007a). Police from the Centre of Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA) in December 2008 arrested two uncles and a step-grandfather for raping a 12-year-old girl in their custody (Jamaica Star, 2008b). Additionally, the Jamaica Star (2009) reported that a 48-year-old uncle pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting and impregnating his 12-year-old niece in the Spanish Town Resident Magistrate's Court.

Statistics shows that 70% of rape victims in Jamaica are under the age of consent (Livesey, 2007). A report published by Amnesty International (2006) on sexual violence against women and children in Jamaica, *Just a Little Sex*, highlighted the manner in which the justice system in Jamaica has failed to adequately deal with sexual violence. Amnesty International noted that:

Discrimination is entrenched and often exacerbated in the police and criminal justice system. Women and adolescent girls are rarely believed by the police, so have little confidence in reporting crimes against them. Evidence is often not sought effectively or professionally, and witnesses are rarely protected. In court, women's testimony is explicitly given less weight than men are, thereby depriving women of the right to equality before the law.

("Sexual Violence In Jamaica," para. 3)

According to a media report, the prevalence of sexual abuse against women and girls solicited the anger of a senior magistrate who had to deal with 10 new cases of sexual offenses in one day against women and girls and suggested the re-introduction of chastity belts (Jamaica Observer, 2007). Six of these cases were committed against 6-year-old school girls (Jamaica Observer). These blatant acts against Jamaican girls were allegedly carried out by men and boys, including a 49-year-old basic school principal (Jamaica Gleaner, 2007). According to the senior magistrate, "Shortcomings in national legislation do not deal adequately with marital rape, incest, or sexual harassment, thereby encouraging impunity and leaving women without the protection of the law" (Jamaica Observer, para. 13).

A situational analysis of rape in Jamaica came to the following conclusions: (a) violence and crime in certain communities increased women's vulnerability to rape; (b) rape is very prevalent in many impoverished communities in Jamaica; (c) the majority of the rapes are committed by males ages 16-25 in Jamaica; (d) Jamaica, unlike other Caribbean countries, is not proactive enough in producing legislation to protect women from sexual violence; and (e) Jamaica still operates under an archaic statute dating back to the 1800s when it relates to sexual offenses (Simms, 2007). The executive director of the Women Centre Jamaica indicated how women are sexually exploited in Jamaica, as she acknowledged in an interview that between 2006 and 2007, 766 of the girls enrolled in the program between the ages of 12 and 16 became pregnant (Jamaica Gleaner, 2008d).

Perception of Advocacy Groups on Missing and Abused Children

Advocacy groups have offered various explanations for this unprecedented behavior. For example, Blaine of the advocate group Hear the Children's Cry argued that maltreatment and abuse is the primary factor why children leave their homes (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009c). She believes that often these children are unhappy at home and experience some form of abuse (e.g., sexual, physical), in addition to being hungry and in need of material things (e.g., clothes, books, etc.). In her analysis, she maintains that missing children in Jamaica are a "phenomenon" that does not affect the upper classes (para. 14). To her, it is 100% a problem of the poor and working class, because it is these children who go missing. Blaine further argued that other children are sent away from home for economic reasons (Jamaica Gleaner).

Research conducted between January and November of 2009 by Jamaica for Justice (2009), a children's lobby group, revealed that some teenage girls reported missing were actually

affected them with sexually-transmitted diseases. The research also found that certain parishes (e.g., Kingston, St. Andrew, St. James, Clarendon, and Manchester) accounted for most of the cases of missing children (Jamaican for Justice). Children who find themselves in these situations are more vulnerable to exploitation.

Exploitation of Children

Exploitation of children is just as problematic as other kinds of abuse in Jamaica, which is blamed on the increased pervasiveness of online media; this has put a new dimension to the victimization of a greater number of children. Evidence of this is the use of the internet to commit crime against children globally. For the last decade, there has been an increasing use of the Internet to prey on innocent victims or to lure unsuspecting children into illegal activities, ranging from sexually explicit conduct to the production, manufacture, and distribution of child pornography (Jamaica Gleaner, 2006). In addition, some are exposed to child pornography, while others are recruited for the purpose of sex tourism, for commercial gain, and/or personal gratification.

Jamaica's *Criminal Code*, Article 58 (2003) prohibits procuring a girl less than 18 years of age for the purposes of prostitution. Furthermore, acts of prostitution that involve girls under the age of 18 are punishable by up to 3 years imprisonment (*Criminal Code*, Article 58, 2003). The *Criminal Code*, Articles 45, 58a, c (2003) also prohibits the procuring of a woman or girl to leave the island for work in prostitution. Moreover, the Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 prohibits the sale or trafficking of any child. Assault, immigration, or customs laws may also be applied to prosecute cases of child trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2004). However, despite all these laws and regulations, human trafficking, especially the internal movement of young women to work as exotic dancers or prostitutes in night clubs, brothels, go-go clubs, or massage parlors, is evident in certain locations in Jamaica.

Reports from the Jamaican police communication network illustrate that often children reported missing are located in popular hot spots known for seafood, guest houses, and prostitution (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009e). For example, the Jamaica Gleaner (2009d) printed an article with the headline *Teen prostitutes - Missing 15-y-o selling sexual favors on Back Road*. Another article, titled *Five teens held on 'Back Road' - Police crackdown on prostitutes*, featured five 16-year-old girls who were reported missing to be among the 15 persons suspected of prostitution on the *backroad strip* in Portmore, St. Catherine (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009e). Additionally, the police reported that adult males take girls from schools to hotels located on the strip. The practice of minors engaging in prostitution in this location solicited the wrath of one business operator on the strip when she said "sometimes when I see the young girls them and what them doing to their bodies, me stomach sick" (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009e, para. 11).

Although the Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 stated that hiring a child to work in a night club would attract a penalty of JA\$1 million and the risk of having the club closed by government licensing authorities, some night club owners are

being held hostage by inner-city thugs, who impregnated or in- still breach the law. The 2009-2010 report of the Office of the

Children's Advocate (OCA) indicated that children were still engaged in or subjected to illegal activities (e.g., trafficking and armed conflict) in a number of night clubs and other establishments (OCA, 2011). Hence, it was recommended that the police should conduct more raids at night clubs, bars, and massage parlors as part of an effort to minimize the involvement of children in illicit activities (OCA).

In 2001, a study conducted in Jamaica on behalf of the International Labor Organization-International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC), found that children as young as 10 and 11 were sexually exploited, engaged in prostitution, and catered to tourists. The study listed nine categories of children engaged in sex for economic gain, due to the lack of economic support, love, and affection. The first of the nine categories listed was children living and working on the streets, mostly boys between the ages 12 and 18 (ILO-IPEC). In addition to being on the street, the report mentioned that children were trafficked within the island for sexual exploitation and pornography (U.S. Department of State, 2004).

Exploitation of children also occurs in less expected areas, such as in religious communities, which profess good moral values. There have been reports involving ministers, as well as members of their congregations, involved in the exploitation of young children. For instance, an internationally recognized pastor was arrested for sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009b). Another incident reported in the Jamaica Star (2010a) highlighted a deacon of a prominent religious denomination admitting to the content on a tape showing him making sexual advances to a teenage boy. This case was supported by the Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences (Jamaica Gleaner, 2011b). Yet, another deacon of a church in St Catherine was arrested for sexually molesting a 12-year-old girl in her bathroom (Jamaica Star, 2011). Again this case was supported by Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences.

The practice of taping sexual encounters has generated much discussion and concern among the public, who seek to offer some explanation. For example, much has been blamed on the Internet's pornographic websites, which constantly require new material. With the increasing demand of pornographic material, unsuspecting teens often become victims. Luton (2006), reporting on a survey done in the Corporate Area (Kingston and St. Andrew), revealed an increasing demand for locally-produced pornographic movies with young girls. The response of one male vendor in downtown Kingston was also documented, in regard to the high demand for his products, saying, "people buy dem as dem come" ([people purchase these tapes as soon as they are received], para. 4). In addition, one Corporate Area store proprietor acknowledged that locally produced pornographic movies were in great demand and implied that local DVDs with young girls were marketed very fast (Luton). The practice of illegal sexual behavior has become so widespread that school children are involved in this behavior. On September 26, 2008, four boys aged 11 to 14 were sentenced for carnal abuse after pleading guilty in the Home Circuit Court to charges of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl on two occasions (Jamaica Gleaner, 2008c).

Easy access of pornographic videos through the Internet has been blamed for this new education on sexual behavior.

The power of technology (e.g., pens or cellular phones with cameras) has also contributed to the exploitation of children, because images can easily be concealed. Once captured, images may be uploaded to either the Internet or a secondary medium, which aid in the publicity of children.

Children are not only influenced by the Internet, but often get involved in sexual encounters because of poverty. Amnesty International (2006) highlighted cases of girls being coerced to provide sexual favors to older men who *mind* (take care of) them in return for protection; for example, bus conductors take girls to school for no fee or provide them with money to buy school books. In circumstances such as this, children have to make choices between pursuing an education and rescuing themselves, and potentially their families, from poverty and being free from sexual violence and exploitation (Amnesty International).

Similarly, Gayle (2007) argued that parents of children in poor communities are involved in the exploitation of young Jamaicans. Furthermore, he noted that a large number of Jamaican children are head of their households, and others are forced to drop out of school. This is not only exploitation, but also abuse.

Moreover, there are also myths that have contributed to the sexual exploitation of girls, such as belief that adolescent girls are less likely to carry sexually transmitted diseases and hence are more likely to be sought or sexually exploited by men. Also, it is believed that men who have contacted sexually transmitted diseases may be cured by having sexual intercourse with a virgin.

Child Labor

The Child Care and Protection Act of 2004 prohibits the employment of children under the age of 13; however, children ages 13 to 15 have limited permission to work in a prescribed list of occupations, as indicated by the Minister of Labor. Among the prohibited jobs are night work, industrial work, and work that is hazardous or interferes with education. Child labor violators can be subject to a fine of JA \$500,000 or six months imprisonment.

The Statistical Institute of Jamaica (2002, 2005) estimated that 2.2% of children ages 5 to 17 were working in Jamaica in 2002. While child labor is not reported to be a significant problem in Jamaica's formal sector (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2002, 2005), children were found working in certain sectors, notably fishing, agriculture, and tourism (ILO-IPEC, 2003a). More than 2,800 children live on the streets (UNICEF, 2005) and are engaged in work, such as newspaper delivery, panhandling (i.e., buying and selling on the street), and domestic service (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2002, 2005). Children also work as shop assistants in carpentry and mechanic shops (ILO-IPEC, 2003b). In tourist resorts, children were reported to work in kitchens, hotels, and recreational and cultural activities. Children employed in these different fields are often subjected to other types of victimization.

The 2006 situation analysis on excluded children reported that 16,240 children aged 5 to 17 were involved in economic activities (Witter, 2009). Furthermore, the analysis found that

working children were mostly boys ages 15 to 17 who worked an average of 22 hours each week. In addition, an estimated 2,000 children live or work on the street. Many are higglers and cleaners of car windscreens during school hours (Witter). UNICEF's (2008) report indicated that 41.7% of the Jamaican poor were children, compared with 46% for those age 18 to 59. Children in Jamaica face many challenges throughout their youth with about a fifth living in poverty. The chance of being poor is greater for those who live in rural communities than those in urban communities (Witter).

Children - Victims of Violence

The protection of Jamaican children from violence is one of the biggest challenges facing the nation. From 2006 to 2008, 230 children under age 17 were murdered, which is a reflection on the high rate of crime and violence plaguing Jamaican society (UNICEF, 2008). Ministry of Health data in 2007 and 2008 stated that over 11,100 cases of violence-related injuries (i.e., sexual assault, stab wounds, gunshots, or blunt force injury) were treated in emergency rooms across island hospitals among persons aged 0 to 19 (UNICEF). Although legislation has banned corporal punishment in early childhood and residential care institutions, it remains the dominant form of discipline in homes, as well as in primary and secondary schools. According to the 2005 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 87% of children aged 2 to 14 are subjected to at least one form of psychological or physical punishment (UNICEF).

Children are often the victims of interfamilial and extra-familial violence. Family violence, abuse, and neglect can be found in families of all social class and economic background. According to Hess (2010), children are mutilated, shot, stabbed, burned, beaten, sodomized, and raped. Lesser, Cooper, and Morales (2005) argued that children are affected by violence through separation from parents. These types of violence may have multiple consequences not only for the children, but also for the family and society. According to them, within the last decade 22,000 youth were labeled *street children* who lived and worked in the streets doing jobs such as machinery, welding, domestic work, care-giving, and newspaper delivery. Many turn to or are forced into child prostitution and/or the drug trade to survive (Lesser, Cooper, & Morales).

Pinheiro (2006), professor and author of the 2006 *UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children*, indicated that, "In an environment where violence breeds more violence, the ways in which Jamaican children are subjected to violence are inextricably linked to the unrelenting levels of crime and violence affecting the island" (p. 1). This dramatic increase of missing children and abuse of children has left an emotional stress and numbness on the society (Pinheiro).

What has being done to Address the Plight of Children?

Several strategies that have been taken to address how children are treated include:

1. Implementation of a more integrated approach to the investigation of child abuse cases resulting from the 2008 Child Protection Audit. This approach was undertaken to reduce the gap between the reporting of the incident and the trial, improve

the quality of evidence provided, and ease the trauma on the child. A model was implemented to improve the way child sexual abuse cases were addressed and increased collaboration among stakeholder. From this model, it is less likely for evidence of child abuse to be lost, as victims would be immediately referred to the system that would not just involve a police investigation, but would involve the social worker who would be actively involved in children's welfare. Additionally, this approach improved the quality of evidence used in court so as to reduce the trauma at the trial process. Other options were identified to ensure the safety of the children rather than place them in a child care facility (Butler, 2010).

2. Addressing by several state agencies the problem of exploitation of children, including the Jamaica Constable Force. The St Catherine South police department launched several operations against prostitutes on *Back Road* targeting nightclubs and other places that attract minors involved in prostitution. The police also conducted several meetings with business operators.

3. Introduction by police of a new policy profiling communities and areas where cases of runaways are most rampant. This policy was aimed at stemming the increasing numbers of missing children across the island (Hunter, 2010).

4. Introduction of the *Ananda Alert* system, a multi-agency system (i.e., law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, and transportation agencies) designed to alert the nation whenever a child is reported missing. This is a nationwide missing children emergency network, inspired by the death of 11-year-old Ananda Dean, who was killed after she disappeared on her way home from school.

5. Dedication of the week of May 16-24 to children under the theme *Our Children...Show Them We Care*. During that week, the wider society undertakes activities to show Jamaican children that society cares. Activities include the staging of educational displays, treats, and special education programs via the electronic media.

6. Display of pictures of missing children on Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC) vehicles, as well as in the JUTC Metropolitan Transport Region.

7. Creation of the website (<http://JamaicanMissingPersons.org>), operated by Loss Control Associates, allows family members to post photographs and pertinent information about missing relatives.

8. Use of electronic and printed media that have been instrumental in yielding positive results. Its involvement has assisted the work of investigating officers, as well as reuniting children with their families.

9. Establishment of government policies and programs to eliminate extreme forms of child labor. In 2004, the Government of Jamaica, in cooperation with ILO-IPEC, concluded a 3-year USDOL-funded national program on child labor (ILO-IPEC, 2003a). The government also provided support to non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that are working on child labor issues (ILO-IPEC, 2004).

10. Commencement (in 2011) of a special project sponsored by the International Labor Organization (ILO), known as TACKLE (Tackle Child Labor), which aims at getting children who live and/or work on the street into a learning environment. The project focuses on rehabilitating and educating working

children, mainly in the metropolitan area and Spanish Town region, as a part of a wider thrust to eliminate child labor in Jamaica.

Challenges Faced

Several challenges encountered in combating the problem of children going missing include:

1. The way in which reports are made. According to police, family members who report missing children sometimes provide cell phone numbers that do not work. When the police try to communicate with these families, either the telephone number has changed or service has been terminated.

2. Inadequate information given by family members. Family members are not able to give adequate information on the missing person, such as the clothing he/she was wearing when last seen and by whom. In addition, some family members did not have a current photograph of the missing person.

3. Families do not report when children return home, so statistics cannot be updated.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow were compiled from those shared during my interviews with law enforcement and human service professionals, children advocate groups, and from articles written in the printed media. They reflect prevention and harm reduction for victims and their parents. Emphasis is placed on the implementation of laws to protect children, for parents to be more proactive, and for the collaboration of human service agencies (e.g., children advocate groups, private sector, and government and law enforcement agencies). Moreover, specific recommendations are made for sexually offending adults and juveniles.

Recommendation #1: protect the children. Prevention must be the first priority in protecting children; hence, there is a need to increase the presence of law enforcement in school zones and communities. There are several advantages to having law enforcement involvement in school zones; it serves as a deterrent to potential perpetrators while potential victims, parents, and teachers feel safer. Furthermore, law enforcement officers are available to respond to emergencies.

Recommendation #2: promote safety among children. Children are at higher risk of victimization when alone; thus, children should be encouraged to commute in groups (e.g., when going or leaving school) to ensure safety. Parents, schools, and child advocacy organizations need to work together in developing and disseminating messages related to the protection and safety of children. The electronic media, especially television, must continue to share responsibility in disseminating information concerning the nature, extent, and seriousness of child victimization, and offer tips of how to avoid being victimized.

Recommendation #3: proactiveness of parents. Parents need to play a more proactive role in the protection of their children to minimize the likelihood of their going missing, being kidnapped, or being exploited. However, if their children do go missing, they need to inform the police immediately for quick action; no need to sit, wait and hope for the safe return of the child. In addition, parents need to supervise their children

regarding the use of computers, since technology is an integral part of children's lives in the 21st century. Parents should be aware of the content their child uploads and downloads on their computer, as well as the people they meet in the chat rooms, as a large number of young people have encountered sexual solicitation, have been introduced to sexual materials, and have engaged with individuals who have threatened and harassed them into illicit sexual activities.

Recommendation #4: technological support. Better technology need to be implemented that fosters better communication between the police, school administrators, and parents of missing children. With improvement in technology, immediate action may be taken to locate missing children. Additionally, school administrators will be able to communicate with the police in the case of a kidnapping at their school.

Recommendation #5: punishing adult sex predators not the child victim. The Jamaican government needs to be more proactive to ensure that the rights of children are protected. In this regard, adult sex predators should be targeted and swift penalties administered. According to Estes and Weiner (2002), law enforcement and human service agencies should focus on the arrest, prosecution, and punishment of adult perpetrators (e.g., pimps, traffickers and customers) who commit sex crimes against children, rather than the apprehension of sexually involved street youth. Moreover, law enforcement agencies should become more involved in the identification and prosecution of adults involved in national and transnational sex crime rings that include child sex, as well as the collaboration of private human service agencies to work more cooperatively with law enforcement (Estes & Weiner).

Recommendation #6: enforce more fully existing laws relating to child sexual exploitation. Prosecutors must use current laws against sexual exploitation of children. The government must assume a leadership position in encouraging law enforcement, as well as all other agencies that cater to children, to fully implement all laws pertaining to the protection of children. These interventions should encourage all government agencies to develop strategic plans for implementing laws related to the protection of children and provide financing for implementing all laws.

Recommendation #7: collaboration of agencies and advocate groups. Human services agencies, service providers (e.g., medical professionals, legal fraternity, etc), advocates, researchers, and policymakers must collaborate in identifying victims. If victims are identified and reports are made to the relevant authorities as the law specifies, more adult sex predators will be identified and brought to justice.

Recommendation #8: provision of service for victims. Victims must have access to specialized services. In receiving specialized service, victims will not feel they are being criminalized by the criminal justice process. Victims offered these services will be more willing to participate in prosecutions.

Recommendation #9: implementation of law to regulate Internet sex crime. The establishment of a government funded Internet Crimes against Children unit would systematically evaluate sex crime through the entire island. This would provide an overall picture of what is happening to children throughout Jamaica.

Jamaica, like other countries worldwide, is experiencing social issues of abuse and exploitation of children despite the many laws, protective treaties, and conventions that have been ratified to protect them from deprivation of their liberty. Children are innocent victims that should be educated about their rights as provided by the convention on the rights of the child and the laws of Jamaica that were enacted to protect them. The various strategies implemented by the government are an indication of concern, but this concern needs to be shown by the wider society. Earlier identification and more intensive supervision of sexually offending adults and juveniles should be of priority, as children are our future; they must be protected, and their rights must not be ignored. In addition, there is a need for more in-depth research into other societal factors that may contribute to the abuse and exploitation of children.

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