What is IMPACT Justice?

IMPACT Justice is a Project funded by the Canadian Government. It is being implemented by the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus in 13 CARICOM Member States: Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago.

The outcome of the project is enhanced access to justice benefiting men, women, youth and businesses. The components are: legislative drafting, establishment and expansion of legal databases, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), legal professional education and standards, and public legal education.

Incest and Similar Forms of Sexual Abuse

Children who are victims of incest and other forms of sexual abuse sometimes act out or behave promiscuously. Younger children may show signs of sexual knowledge or behaviour that is unusual for their age. They may also withdraw from others or display aggression. Older children may experience or show depression, withdrawal, poor self image, running away, seductive or promiscuous behaviour, prostitution, self destructive behaviour, and changes in school performance.

Unfortunately, sometimes those who do speak up are not believed. And sometimes the situation is hushed up because the abuser is the income provider. The victim in all cases may get into trouble instead of getting the help they need. This can lead to further emotional problems and an inability to trust.

If a Child Tells You About Incest

- Stay calm and be reassuring
- Find a quiet place to talk
- Listen
- Say that you are glad the child told you
- Say that you will do your best to protect and support the child
- If necessary, seek medical help and contact the police or social services
- Acknowledge that your child may have angry, sad or even guilty feelings about what happened, but stress that the abuse was not the child’s fault.
- Acknowledge that you will probably need help dealing with your own feelings
- Seek counselling for yourself and the child

What is Incest?

Incest is defined as sex between members of the same family. While there are rare instances where the persons involved are consenting adults, in most cases, incest is a form of sexual abuse with a victim and a perpetrator. Incest can occur in any household in any segment of society. Both boys and girls may be victims.

Many times the victims, being young, do not realize that what is happening is wrong. Sometimes they become afraid to tell anyone for fear that the perpetrator will hurt a loved one or break up the family. Other times they fear not being believed.

Similar issues may arise where the perpetrator and victim are not related but are members of the same household, such as a step-parent and step-child.

Call to Action

The Caribbean has one of the highest rates of incest and rape in the world. Unfortunately it is difficult for policy makers to address the issue because of lack of data.

If someone you know is a victim of incest, report it to the police or call the child protection services. There are no innocent bystanders. Change will only come when we break the silence.

“Break the Silence” is a UNICEF initiative on child sexual abuse. See http://www.unicef.org/lac/Break_the_Silence-Introduction_pdf

It is estimated that one in four girls and one in 10 boys experience some form of sexual abuse during their childhood.

There are some factors that increase children’s risk; history of violence in the home, alcohol or drug use, families who are isolated and unsupported, serial or multiple partnering of parents, lack of protective nurturing role provided by mother and father, and lack of appropriate sexual boundaries. While financial hardship is a factor, it is important to remember that there are many poor families where there is no abuse.

The non-abusive parent may be silent or in denial. Sometimes this happens because they favour the abuser over the child, other times, they may be economically dependent on the abuser. But sometimes they are themselves victims of physical or other types of abuse and may not feel empowered to change the situation. The ultimate responsibility for sexual abuse lies with the abuser.

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There is not much information on the number of cases each year and it is believed that only a fraction of the true number of cases are reported. Sometimes there is a cover up to protect the family’s perceived standing in the community. Other times, persons fail to report because they are pessimistic that justice will be served, or because they think that the penalty, years in prison, is too harsh. Unfortunately this leaves perpetrators free to continue their crimes.

There are many cases where the same abuser assaults several members of the same family, focusing on younger children as the original victims grow older.

Long term effects of incest and sexual abuse may include difficulties in interpersonal relationships, difficulties with sexual boundaries, depression, self-harm, low self-esteem, risky sexual behaviour, substance misuse, violence, injuries to reproductive organs, sexually transmitted diseases and abortion and associated risks.