Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing
Held on Wednesday, July 10, 2019
[10:21 a.m. to 12:01 p.m.]

3rd Public hearing re: An inquiry into the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and the state’s capacity to minimise the occurrence of teenage pregnancy and provide services and assistance to teenage parents.


Committee members
The following committee members were present:

1. Mr. Paul Richards – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
3. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
5. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
6. Ms. Allyson West
7. Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
Witnesses who appeared

The following officials were present:

Child Welfare League

1. Ms. Cheryl Ann Guy - Centre Manager
2. Mrs. Cheryl Alleyne-Ross - Regional Coordinator

Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists

1. Ms. Anna Maria Mora - Counselling Psychologist/Author

Single Fathers’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago

1. Mr. Rhondall Feeles - President

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Child Welfare League

i. The CHOICES programme was established in 1994 as a support service for teenage mothers, pregnant teenagers and teenagers at risk of becoming pregnant.

ii. The main objectives of the programme are to:
   a) facilitate the reintegration of teenage mothers into the education system and wider society; and
   b) assist teenage mothers in postponing further child bearing until they achieve physical, emotional and financial maturity.

iii. Teenage fathers are not involved in the programme, given that the girls are generally reluctant to divulge their identities.

iv. Three core areas of instruction are provided to the teenage mothers: academic subjects, vocational studies and health and family life education (HFLE).

v. The sexual and reproductive health education provided by the League may not be followed by some girls due to the social and economic circumstances of their homes.

vi. Funding is a major challenge to the sustainability of the CHOICES programme.
vii. Approximately 1,200 teenage girls and their families have participated in CHOICES since establishment.

viii. On average, the teenage mothers remain in the programme for 6 – 9 months.

ix. Approximately 3% of girls who have participated in the programme have had a second pregnancy.

x. Girls who become pregnant for a second time are not allowed to re-enter the programme.

xi. Girls are referred by the Ministry of Education (MoE) while the Ministry of Health (MoH) provides assistance in delivering counselling and HFLE to the girls.

xii. Formerly, the CWL coordinated an outreach programme, the Adolescent Mothers Programme, in primary schools to help prepare students to transition successfully into secondary school.

xiii. The Adolescent Mothers Programme was terminated in 2016 following the introduction of a similar programme by the MoE.

xiv. There is a need for more attention to be directed to teenage fathers given that some have children with multiple girls.

xv. The CWL currently does not collaborate with the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists (TTAP) or the Single Fathers’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SFATT).

xvi. The CWL collaborates with faith-based organizations in delivering its services.¹

Issues discussed with the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists

i. Teenage pregnancies are usually unplanned. Consequently, teenage parents often experience psychological disorders in the form of anxiety, insomnia, depression, self-esteem issues and loneliness together with other social challenges.

ii. In many school districts, data does not accurately reflect a correlation between the number of girls attending school and teenage pregnancy.

iii. According to enquiries done in one school district, 75 girls aged 14 to 17 years dropped out of school due to pregnancy during the 2018/2019 academic year to date.

¹ This was also expressed by the TTAP and the SFATT.
Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,
Community Development, and other Social Services)

iv. The need to work with males and allow them to understand the responsibilities of fatherhood and manhood.

v. There is a need to sensitize girls about the importance of disclosing the identities of the boys/men who impregnated them.²

vi. There is a need for Social Workers to frequently visit and monitor homes in at-risk communities.

vii. There is a need to provide community-based centres which can provide supervision and allow children to engage in positive social activities outside of school hours.

viii. The Mariama Centre was established by Ms. Anna Maria Mora in 1990 and offers sexual and reproductive health education alongside social activities for adolescents.

ix. The TTAP has repeatedly advocated for the establishment of a National Psychological Trauma Centre which can provide services for victims of sexual abuse, among other traumas.

Issues discussed with the Single Fathers’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago

i. There is a lack of statistical information related to single fathers, in contrast with the availability of information about teenage pregnancy.

ii. The SFATT is a member of the Central Education Multisector Committee (CEMC) alongside Ministries, state entities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)³.

iii. The CEMC initiated an empowerment caravan in 5 schools in the Central region between 2017-2018 which focused on teenage parenthood, responsible sexual practices and deviant behaviours including sexual misconduct, gang involvement etc.

iv. In September 2019, the second phase of the caravan will be delivered to groups of students who are at-risk of the aforementioned issues within the same 5 schools.

v. And evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme will be conducted upon its completion.

vi. There are plans to extend the CEMC model and caravan to all police districts.

² This was also expressed by the CWL.
³ These include the Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Children’s Authority, National Family Services, NIHERST, Children’s Court, Two Cents Movement.
vii. With regard to advocacy for teenage fatherhood, there is a lack of resources and willingness by the State. In addition, NGOs have shortcomings in harnessing and gathering statistics.

eight. The SFATT’s membership is primarily composed of adult fathers aged 25 to 65 years. There are few members who are teenage fathers.

ix. Prior to the decriminalization of sexual activity among minors, mothers of teenage fathers sought assistance from the SFATT when their sons were prosecuted for such activity.

x. In the future, the SFATT intends to engage the Legal Aid representatives of the CEMC to assist boys who commit sexual offences in schools.

xi. There is a need to provide greater support to teenage fathers. Teenage fathers also experience social consequences related to teenage pregnancy.

xii. It is important to deliver sex and reproductive health education in Primary and Secondary schools to sensitize students about pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and other issues.⁴

xiii. The SFATT advocates against media advertisements that promote negative sexual attitudes and behaviours such as infidelity.

xiv. Single fathers are less likely to receive custody of their children compared to single mothers. According to the Association, only 2% of custody matters in the courts result in shared custody.

**View the Hearing**

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n9qdQ5oRA0

**Contact the Committee’s Secretary**

jscsspa@ttparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2283

**Committees Unit**

*July 31, 2019*

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⁴ This was also expressed by the TTAP and the CWL.