

**RESPONSE TO THE
THIRTEENTH REPORT OF THE
JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION:**

Ministry of Social
Development and Family
Services

**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**

May, 2020

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minimise the occurrence of teenage pregnancy and provide services and
assistance to teenage parents**

Wednesday 6th May, 2020

GENERAL COMMENTS:

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, having reviewed the report, considers it to be comprehensive, providing useful recommendations on the way forward for the key agencies with responsibility for matters related to the issue. The Ministry notes however, that whilst there were recommendations for development of an inter-sectoral strategy, related to the Integrated Strategic Plan for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy, including a cross-departmental ministerial task force, there were no recommendations with regard to institutionalized mechanisms for collaboration with the civil society agencies relevant to the provision of services for this target group. The Ministry proposes that this could be included in recommendation I. under the medium term recommendations.

In addition, the Ministry, noting that pregnant teenagers may find themselves in vulnerable situations without familial support, recommends that some consideration be given to introducing financial support for the target group.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION:

MSDFS to provide an update on the status on the National Parenting Policy and Implementation Plan.

RESPONSE:

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) commenced the final Phase i.e Phase III of the National Parenting Policy and Implementation Plan in August, 2019, which is currently at the Green Paper stage. This Phase involves the conduct of a targeted series of Focus Group Sessions conducted by the MSDFS with key stakeholder groups such as: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of and for persons with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, parents with disabilities, children with disabilities, children living with HIV/AIDS, parents living with HIV/AIDS, single mothers and fathers, parents, civil society including Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), teenage parents (female), teenage parents (male), grandparents, and step-parents/guardians. Also included in this Phase are the

discussion groups under the remit of sector partners, and discussion groups in Tobago in conjunction with the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development.

The focus group sessions were divided into three (3) phases of implementation:

- Phase 1 – Discussion Groups under the remit of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS);
- Phase 2 – Discussion groups under the remit of sector partners, i.e. Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of National Security (MNS), Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (MSYA) and Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs (OPMGCA); and
- Phase 3 – Discussion groups in Tobago in conjunction with the Division of Health Wellness and Family Development.

The objectives of the Focus Group Discussions were primarily to:

- capture issues and concerns related to parenting in Trinidad and Tobago by identifying needs, perceptions, experiences, emotions, attitudes etc;
- generate ideas or recommendations on possible areas of assistance, policies or programmes that would be beneficial to support parenting;
- examine how state and non-state social support services have assisted parents, children and families; and
- determine in what ways support services can be improved.

Status Update on Phase 2 of the Focus Group discussions

Phase 2 of the focus group discussions i.e. sessions under the remit of sector partners was delayed given the advent of the global medical emergency/pandemic concerning the Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID 19, as well as the Government's Social Distancing and Stay-at-Home regulations. However, the MSDFS proposes the continuation and completion of this Phase to commence in June 2020 and complete by September 2020. Accordingly, the MSDFS will partner with five (5) other Ministries / State Agencies inclusive of THA to facilitate the conduct and analysis of the focus group sessions. A summary of the proposed *Sessions By Other Ministries (21 Focus Groups)* is highlighted in *Appendix II*.

Completion of Post Mortem Report on Phase I

A Post Mortem Report (October, 2019) has been prepared on Phase 1 of the Focus Group Sessions conducted by the MSDFS. Findings revealed that participants were: (i) satisfied with

the sessions, (ii) appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the policy, and (iii) wanted more opportunities where they could be involved in national discussions.

Lessons Learnt

There were a number of lessons learnt, as follows:

- A longer lag time between planning/scheduling and the actual conduct of the sessions to ensure maximum participation of the targeted groups;
- A database of organisations with up-to-date emails and contact information;
- Hosting sessions where possible in the afternoon/evening or weekend to capture persons who are interested but cannot make weekday times;
- Having smaller target numbers for some of the groups, as well as having smaller discussion groups (i.e. 4 – 6 depending on the group);
- Liaising with sector partners and/or stakeholders formally and informally at an early stage to garner their support with mobilization and recruitment;
- Selected access to social media during office working hours to facilitate searches for organization and contacts via messenger given that some NGOs only have Facebook pages not official websites (these activities had to be done during weekends or on personal devices).

Conclusion

Whereas no major issues in the completion of this phase of the focus groups sessions conducted by the MSDFS were identified, it was recognized that the main issue related to not having sufficient time to mobilize participants. However, the Ministry continues to note the importance of sustaining all momentum going into the next phase. It is further anticipated that *ceteris paribus* (“all other things being equal”) the National Parenting Policy could be finalized for approval as a White Paper before the close of the calendar year 2020.

May 05, 2020

MSDFS SESSIONS – STATUS UPDATE

Table 2. National Parenting Programme- Actual Focus Group Sessions Completed for the period August, 2019- September, 2019, and November, 2019 in Trinidad and Tobago

No.	Focus Group Session	No. of Sessions	Target Number	Actual Number
1	NGOs of and for Persons with Disabilities	1	10	5
2-4	Parents of Children with Disabilities	3	24	17
5	Children with Disabilities	1	8	3
6	Children living with HIV / AIDS	1	8	9
7	Parents living with HIV/AIDS	1	8	7
8	Single Mothers	1	8	4
9	Single Fathers	1	8	6
10-11	Parents	2	16	14
12-13	Civil Society including Religious Bodies and FBOs	2	20	8
14	Teenage Parents (Female)	1	8	3
15	Grand Parents	1	8	8
16	Step-Parents/Guardians	1	8	5
17	Parents of children with Disabilities; and NGOs of and for Persons with Disabilities.	1	14	25
18	Parents	1	6	5
	TOTAL	18	154	119

Sessions By Other Ministries (21 Focus Groups)- March, 2020- July, 2020

Table 3: Focus Groups by State Partners

State Partner	Division / Department	Categories of Focus Group Participants	Type G = General S = Sensitive	Number of Focus Groups	Number of Participants per Agency	
					Minimum	Maximum
MOE / OPM		1. Young Persons (Primary School)	G	4	24	48
		2. Youth (Secondary Schools)	G			
		3. Youth in vocational schools	G			
MOE		4. Professionals (School Supervisors & Counsellors)	G			
MSYA		1. Youth 18-29 years	G	1	6	12
OPM		1. Children living with biological parents	G	3	18	36
		2. Children living with single parents	G			
		3. Children cared for by non-biological parents / Guardians / Extended family	S			
		1. Non-Biological Parents / Guardians (foster / adoptive)	S	3	18	36

State Partner	Division / Department	Categories of Focus Group Participants	Type G = General S = Sensitive	Number of Focus Groups	Number of Participants per Agency	
					Minimum	Maximum
Children's Authority (CA)		2. Children in institutions (Children's Homes) 3. Parents / relatives of children in institutions	S			
		1. Children of parents who are incarcerated	S	1	6	12
	CA & MNS	2. Children in conflict with the law.	S	1	6	12
MNS		1. Parents of children who are in conflict with the law. 2. Incarcerated parents	S	1	6	12
			S	1	6	12
Total Number of Focus Groups and Participants in Trinidad				15	90	180
THA	Sport & Youth Affairs Education, Innovation & Energy Health, Wellness &	1. Children	G	1	6	12
		2. Youth	G	1	6	12
		1. Parents / Grandparents / Guardians	G	1	6	24

State Partner	Division / Department	Categories of Focus Group Participants	Type G = General S = Sensitive	Number of Focus Groups	Number of Participants per Agency	
					Minimum	Maximum
	Family Development	2. Professionals (Educators and representatives from State Agencies)	G	1	6	24
	Community Development, Enterprise Development and Labour	1. Civil Society 2. Faith Based Organisations	G G	1 1	6 6	12 24
Total Number of Focus Groups and Participants in Tobago				6	36	108
Total Number of Focus Groups and Participants Conducted by State Partners of Trinidad and Tobago				21	126	288