

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY HELD IN THE DR. WAHID ALI MEETING ROOM, LEVEL 6, (IN CAMERA) AND J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM (MEZZANINE FLOOR) (IN PUBLIC), OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2016 AT 1.00 P.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly	Chairman
Miss Sarah Budhu	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith,	Member
Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh	Member
Mr. Dennis Moses	Member
Mr. Rodger Samuel	Member
Miss Jennifer Raffoul	Member
Candice Skerrette	Secretary

OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Haimdath Ramoutar	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Sharon Winchester	National Family Services

OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ms. Gillian Macintyre	Permanent Secretary
Mr. Harrilal Seecharan	Chief Education Officer
Dr. Kathy Bharratsingh	Manager, Student Support Services

	Division
Mrs. Cheryl Ann Grant	Special Education Coordinator
Ms. Kathy Ann Felix-John	School Social Worker
Mrs. Darlene Smith-Joseph	Guidance Officer II
OFFICIALS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER	
Ms. Jacqueline Johnson	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mr. Learie Barry	Manager, Policy Research and Planning
Ms. Sharifa Ali-Abdullah	Director, Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
Mrs. Vandana Siewsanter-Ali	Assessment Manager, Children's Authority (Ag.)

OFFICIALS FROM THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POLICE SERVICE

Ms. Odette Lewis	Superintendent (Ag.), Child Protection Unit
Mrs. Margarte Sampson-Brown	Manager, Victim & Witness Support Unit
Ms Beverly Paul	Inspector (Ag.), Child Protection Unit

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to now convene the meeting, this public hearing, and to welcome the representatives of the various agencies who are here with us this afternoon. Thank you for being here. And also to welcome the Members of the viewing and listening public to the Fifth Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity, and this is our first public hearing for the Eleventh Parliament.

I would like to welcome specifically officials from the Ministry of Education, from the Office of the Prime Minister, from the Ministry of Social

Development and Family Services, as well as those from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. I would like to introduce myself. My name is Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly and I am the Chairman of this Committee, and I now would like to invite the other members of the Committee to also introduce themselves. May I remind all Members that we have to switch on microphones as we speak?

[Introduction by Members of the Committee]

[Introductions by the Officials from the various entities]

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Very well sent. This afternoon, I just want to give a little contextual background to what we are doing. I just want to recognize the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education who is joining us. Thank you. Today, we are here to discuss and to enquire about the support programmes and services for children whose parents or guardians were the perpetrators or victims of violent offences. That is what we are here to discuss and we would have received written submissions from the different agencies. So I would just like to, before inviting the questions and opening the discussion, just give a contextual background as to why we are looking at this particular issue.

I want to read for you a quote which came in one of our submissions which says that:

Children who are exposed to violence may continue to show signs of problems. Primary school age children may have more trouble with schoolwork and show poor concentration and focus. They tend not to do as well in school. In one study, 40 per cent had lower reading abilities than children from non-violent homes.

Another:

Children who grow up with violence in the home learn early and powerful lessons about the use of violence in interpersonal relationships to dominate others and might even be encouraged in doing so.

And a very last quote I want to read for you before I give some statistics, it comes from Shaw (1987), which says:

“...if we do not attend to the effects of imprisonment on children, we run the risk of punishing innocent victims, neglecting a seriously at-risk group, and possibly causing crime in the next generation.”

Considering these particular statements and looking at some of the statistics that apply to our country, in 2014, the statistics for prisoners in Trinidad and Tobago showed that 64 per cent of prisoners were male in the 18 to 35 age group or category which corresponds to 2,239 male prisoners out of a total of 3,524. If we look at this and consider very conservatively that maybe 50 per cent of these males in that age group have at least one child, then we are talking about roughly a thousand or more children who are at risk having parents that are perpetrators of crime.

And if we consider in a UNDP report on citizen security in 2012 which gave statistics that in 2011, out of a total 394 murders, 60 per cent of these were victims between the ages of 21 and 40. It means that you have a total of 236 persons roughly and if we again use a very conservative figure, 50 per cent of that age group having at least one school age child, then we are talking about roughly 118 children of school age that have parents who would have been victims of violent crime and that is just dealing with murder alone.

So using these rough statistics and these rough figures, it is clear that there is a problem that we have to face head-on and there are children who may be in this situation and these figures really are quite conservative. I want to draw in my own experience of a young teacher in a certain school, a primary school, who was shocked to understand that the students in her class, they asked her a question, they asked her if her father was alive and she said yes, and what she was surprised at is the very—I do not want to say callous, but very casual way—I should put it that

way—in which the students of the class began to relate to each other the ways in which their fathers had died. And these were all victims of violent murders and that type of situation seems to be more prevalent than we would think in our school system and so on.

And given the fact that we are saying that studies have shown—not our local studies, but studies have shown that the effects of imprisonment and exposure to violence on children are very deleterious and given the fact that our budget for national security has increased by 66 per cent between 2012 and 2015 and we have not seen a commensurate decrease in violent crime nor in the murder rate, it really begs the question: are we by not paying attention to these children who are described as the forgotten victims of crime, orphans of justice, are we by not paying the attention necessary, are we fuelling the next generation of crime?

So it is within this context that this study or this enquiry was birthed and so we have asked the members of the different agencies represented here to supply us with written submissions which deal with some of these issues and so we are here now asking questions, whereby we can come up with recommendations that we can suggest that would allow us to help such children.

And so I just want to remind of the objectives of the enquiry which would be to understand the impact on children whose parents or guardians were the victims or perpetrators of violent offences; to examine the adequacy of programmes and services to support children whose parents or guardians were the victims or perpetrators of violent offences, and to identify and evaluate the current relationship among stakeholders of child support services.

At this time, I would like to indicate that this hearing is being broadcast live on Parliament Channel 11, on Parliament radio 105.5 FM and the Parliament's YouTube channel, *ParlView*. So viewers and listeners, if you are so inclined, you can send the Committee questions related to today's topic via email, via facebook

or via Twitter. Email at parl101@ttparliament.org; [facebook.com@ttparliament](https://www.facebook.com/ttparliament) and on [twitter@ttparliament](https://twitter.com/ttparliament).

We acknowledge and thank the agencies for their written responses and we received from the Ministry of Education their response on April 19, 2016; from the Office of the Prime Minister, on April 20, 2016; from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, on April 19, 2016 and Trinidad and Tobago Police Service on April 22, 2016. We do thank you for submitting those written submissions which in every case did add to the weight of our deliberations.

At this time, I would like to invite brief opening remarks from the representatives of each agency, Ms. Gillian Macintyre, the PS of the Ministry of Education; Ms. Jacqueline Johnson, Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister; Ms. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and Ms. Odette Lewis, Superintendent, Child Protection Unit, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. We will lead off with Ms. Gillian Macintyre.

Ms. Macintyre: Good afternoon to members of the Joint Select Committee and thank you for affording us this opportunity to come and speak with you, dialogue with you, on what can be done to improve our programmes, as well as our relationships as ministerial departments trying to deal with this issue.

Just to say that the primary unit in the division in the Ministry of Education that helps to address this issue is the Student Support Services and within the Student Support Services, there are guidance counsellors, there are social workers, there are Special Ed teachers who all are directed at looking at each referral to them in a comprehensive manner.

Admittedly, we do not have the ratios in place that we would like to have in place. For example, from many of the visits we have done to schools recently with the Minister, it is becoming increasingly obvious that there needs to be, for

example, social workers dedicated in some of the more at-risk schools. Special Ed also, there is a need for, again, a dedicated person and right now, the numbers would only allow us either to pilot or to cluster schools. So that it is not to say it has not increased because within the last few years ago—and the specialist in the area would speak I am sure, but I joined the Ministry in November of last year and I know it has increased substantially, probably about 300 per cent. So we have been increasing numbers.

There are challenges in that although we have increased technical and professional officers, we do not have the kind of administrative support in place to allow them to function effectively and without having to deal with administrative issues as well. We have other issues to look at as well, such as—which only came to my attention recently, for example, although we have liability insurance in schools, many of them would be required to visit homes, we do not have insurance that covers them out there when they are visiting the homes. So we have had to tend to rely on social development in that regard to reach out in those areas who, again, also—and I am sure you will hear from them—are experiencing resource constraints.

Very recently, as a result of the problems we were having in schools, I convened a committee of multiple stakeholders and I think there is not, in my view as someone who is about to exit the system, there is not enough of that. We are operating individually trying to solve problems but there is a great need for some sort of governance system to be in place that looks at these systems.

Underpinning that, I believe there needs to be an information management system that allows the different stakeholders to come together to look at matters on a case basis, because, as I said, we are dealing on an incident basis instead of dealing with a whole family or a comprehensive approach to the persons that are referred into the Student Support Services programmes. But I am sure more will

come out during the course of our discussion so I do not want to monopolize the situation. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Ms. Macintyre. Could I ask now Ms. Jacqueline Johnson, the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister, to give us her brief opening marks.

Ms. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a brief on the role of the Office of the Prime Minister with respect to gender and child development, we drive the policy and the strategies to treat with the overall care and protection of children. The main implementing agency here would be Children's Authority. From our perspective, the major gaps that we are trying to treat with here, the competencies that we need to deliver care and protection to those children who require our support, the resources to, in fact, do that, and we are also seeing there is a gap in the collaboration among the key stakeholder agencies which we need to treat with.

One of the things that we have been doing to ensure that the children receive the necessary care and protection, at the agencies, when they are placed in the care and protection of the State, is to get in those resources that would ensure that they have a proper individualized care plan that would ensure that they receive the right care, education, psychological—all those treatment areas that would allow them to develop as a child, as well as to ensure that they are reunited with their families. We will talk a lot about what we are doing at the homes, the four large state homes, as well as the other 46 privately owned community residences, as well as our collaboration with other state agencies to ensure that what we deliver is in the interest of the child and in the interest of the child's development and reunification with his or her own family. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much. I look forward to our further discussion. Can I ask now Ms. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to give us her opening remarks?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you very much, Chair. I want to begin by saying that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, as you know, we are really the lead agency of Government with regard to implementing Government's social objectives, social development objectives, and the National Family Services Division, which has actually just been transferred to the Ministry from September, is the key agency in the Ministry with regard to the provision of services towards children.

Just to say also that the National Family Services Division was with this Ministry some years ago and they faced a number of challenges which they still do face, and I think as we discuss around the table, we will see that it is very important for us to put in place mechanisms for collaboration. So we are very happy to be part of the session this afternoon and to really interrogate this issue and to ensure that we have the systems in place to support these children.

I remember some years ago, when we had that young man whose parents were killed by the Dole Chadee gang—if you remember that situation—and that young man, he was very young at the time and his sister and himself, they survived that attack, and because of the systems again, they were left—in particular, he was left alone and we know the end of that story. And I think it tells us that unless we have a robust system in place, all the agencies are collaborating to ensure that the children do not fall through the cracks, we will have a situation where we will have children, not only in school but children who have dropped out of school ending up in St. Michael's and all those other institutions. So I am hoping that at the end of these discussions that one of the outcomes would be that we have a mechanism for the collaboration to take place. I know it is taking place probably on an unofficial basis but I am talking about an official mechanism for that collaboration to take place.

And just to say that the Family Services Division, we still have challenges

with respect to the human resource, that is our main challenge right now, and we recognize too that most of the responsibility has gone to the Children's Authority in terms of this issue. But because the Family Services Division still has the intervention at the level of the family, it is still critical that we know what is happening and that there is that collaboration where each agency's responsibility ends, we know where the other begins. I think that is important for us.

We also have challenges in terms of actually getting the resources that we need, because the fact that there is no standardization in terms of the remuneration to social workers across the public service and it means that most times, the salaries that is given to persons who are in family services is much less than the social workers in other agencies. I think that is another issue that we have to address if we want to ensure that each agency is adequately resourced. So I want to end by saying that we are really happy for this discussion and we look forward to the outcomes. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And can I now ask Ms. Odette Lewis, Superintendent, of the Child Protection Unit of the TTPS, to give us her opening remarks. Thank you.

Supt. Lewis: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good afternoon to the panel. What I would like to say is that we in the TTPS, the Child Protection Unit, we deal with the investigative arm. We investigate the criminal aspects with respect to children under 18 and perpetrators of these crimes are brought to justice. We do not provide direct programmes and services for the support for the victims, witness, parents and guardians of these children. However, when they are brought to our attention, they are referred to the Children's Authority and the Victim and Witness Support Unit who we work in collaboration with and have a good relationship.

I would like to also add in that the Child Protection Unit, despite the

challenges that we face, we work assiduously in ensuring that our nation's children are safe and secure. Yes, we have challenges, but within recent times, Cabinet has approved, via the Cabinet Note, the increase for the strength for the unit. That is being addressed by our Commissioner of Police and I welcome that.

Added to that, we will definitely work together with the stakeholders. At present, we are working with the Ministry of Education to address the issues that are in the schools, together with TTPS to ensure that a common understanding of deviant behaviour, perpetrators of crime because we have children committing crimes as well. So all in all, I am happy for this moment and whatever information is needed by the Committee, we are here and willing to assist in providing that. I thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much. So, now we want to go straight into our questioning session and I just want to remind the members and officials that any questions you have, direct it through the Chair so that we can have an orderly session.

I will start the ball rolling and I want to address my question to the officials from the Office of the Prime Minister with specific reference to the data that is being used to inform the policies and so on that are being made. At this point in time, the written submission indicated that there are no studies with respect to children whose parents are the victims of crime or whose parents may be incarcerated and that type of thing. There are no studies at this point in time. So I want to ask the members who are here, the officials who are here from the Office of the Prime Minister, are there any plans for that type of study to happen and if so, could you tell us what you would be looking at and what is the time frame that you would be working with?

Ms. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair. As we indicated in the submission, we really have not done any studies in that area and we did not plan to initiate any

studies in that area. We are now focusing on those other areas that—treating with overall child abuse. How the child is affected in terms of bullying and that sort of thing. So those are the areas that we are focusing now. This is a subgroup that I agree that we need to focus on equally to put equal interest in and therefore, we will look and see how best we can start doing some research in this area.

I must say that research is something that we are not actively engaged in because we do not have the resources. Right now, we are developing, for example, the child policy and we are looking at general research because the child policy deals with disabled children, children with autism. So those areas are our current focus right now. As I said, I agree that we need to maybe initiate some things in this area but it is not something that we had on our plans right away. The Children's Authority, however, has been provided with a budget of \$200,000 to start some research and I know we have three or four proposals coming out of the Authority, so I will ask the director to indicate those areas for you right now.

1.30 p.m.

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: Thank you very much, PS, before I actually get into the research areas, since our submission, Chair, we have actually combed through our files, our records, of the cases that have come to the Authority. Thus far, we have received 5,300 cases of children in need of care and protection, and of those almost 2,000 cases are under investigations, 800 have been closed, and we actually disaggregated the data. We had our investigation team go through all the cases they have been investigating, and we have been able to get statistics which show that 10 per cent, or 180 children, fall into the category we are discussing this afternoon, that is they are children whose parents are victims or perpetrators of crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

These cases have been referred to our Children and Family Services Unit, and sometimes they are then referred on to the National Family Services unit, or

the Victims and Witness Support Unit, some of our partner agencies, as well as private NGOs. Seventy-two cases have been referred to our assessment team, and my assessment manager, acting, is here to speak about that process if we need to, and we have 48 investigations ongoing in terms of children from that 180 group. So we actually have 180 children that are within our database to treat with that we are currently discussing. Thirty-four children are children whose parents are victims only, and the types of crime, and these are actual cases, as I have said, from the investigation reports, domestic violence, sexual abuse, physical abuse.

Children whose parents are perpetrators only, 41 such children, and the type of crime would include possession of drugs and ammunition, domestic violence, inflicting bodily harm, physical and sexual abuse, and 105 children are children whose parents are both victims and perpetrators, and that is interesting, and, of course, it would include the types of crime I mentioned earlier on. So I think this is instructive. I do have copies of these statistics that I can pass to you, Madam Chair.

In terms of the research, I think it is important to hear from our clinical psychologist, who has been working with the multidisciplinary team at our assessment centres with these children, and part of the process includes, of course, interviewing parents and other members of the household, since it is a holistic type of investment—sorry, assessment, probably investment too, and because it certainly would reduce, as you said earlier in your opening remarks, Chairman, if we invest in these children now I think it is perhaps, you know, the only way to see a reduction in the level of crime that we are experiencing. The kinds of trauma and the kinds of issues that the parents themselves have, and the deficits that these parents have, I think it is instructive. So, through you, Chair, if I can ask Mrs. Vandana Siewsankar-Ali to just speak a little bit about the experiences of assessing this group of children and their parents.

Mrs. Siewsankar-Ali: Good afternoon, everyone. The assessments and the

findings that we have coming out of the assessments really is the live research, and what we have been finding for children whose parents have been either victims of crime and/or perpetrators of crime, be it crime against the children themselves or other violent crimes, we have found that, for the most part, the findings are very similar across these children, and it tends to include a range of internalizing disorders, including clinical diagnoses, such as depression, anxiety. We tend to see a lot of children having difficulties in the school environment coping because they are withdrawn.

We tend to see a lot of acting-out and externalizing behaviours in children, which is very instructive given the type of issues that we are seeing in our schools. We see a lot of aggression and beyond control behaviours, children who have a lot of difficulty managing their anger, a lot of difficulty with destruction of property, minor crimes that these children also engage in. We see a lot of difficulties in terms of attachment, attachment because parents, either the offending parent or the non-offending parent, are emotionally unavailable and unresponsive to address the needs of the children. So we see a lot of attachment difficulties which of course then translates into some of the problems I just discussed. We see where children themselves begin to commit minor crimes, as I said.

We are seeing an increase in the type of issues associated with children becoming triangulated in the violence of the parents' home, so that you are seeing children taking up more adult responsibilities within the home. We are seeing a lot where children become pitted emotionally against one parent, and that is really a very difficult situation when you have defences up. We are seeing substance use disorders emerging from, especially the adolescent population of children who are undergoing this experience. We are also seeing an acceptance of pro-criminal behaviour and attitudes.

So especially among our adolescent males and females, when we look at

their acceptance, their belief systems as it relates to gang activity, as it relates to violence, as it relates to gender stereotypes, these are coming out in our teenagers in terms of their acceptance of this, a sort of pro-criminal lifestyle and a glorification of crime. We are also seeing gender stereotypes being reinforced where we have male beliefs, or female beliefs, of which sex is more likely to be the victim, or which sex is more likely to be the perpetrator of violence. So it is a range of issues, and while we are seeing these coming out initially among this population we know what the long-term consequences are for these children.

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: Chair, if I may complete the response in terms of the research areas, so with \$200,000 there is not much we can do, and we have already identified, looking at the research that focuses on understanding what is driving the high level of sexual abuse. We would have recently disseminated our nine-month statistical bulletin, nine months and counting, as well as a report on sexual abuse against children in Trinidad and Tobago, and they are all related. So that is what we have highlighted. However, given the kind of impact and the issues that have emerged, in fact, in preparing our submission for this enquiry, I think we are going to be reallocating some of the resources, and we would be advocating for additional resources from our Ministry to be able to do some research, because we actually have, as the psychologist was saying, live data, these are actual cases that we can look at.

So rather than having a study that speaks about things in an academic way, this is reality that we are treating with. The spreadsheet that I have here, that of course is sanitized since we treat information with strict confidentiality, so even our cases are numbered, actually has information by geographical area, a lot of data. So we can actually do some research and provide that kind of information. We can analyse the cases, you know, by various categories, look at different variables, and to so see what is really driving, you know, these trends.

Mr. Samuel: Chair, based on the submission of both parties from the Children's Authority, and I am glad you talked about geographic locations, I wanted to find out, have you been able to base your studies on ethnicities, and culture, and all these kinds of things?—because I am certain that one cap does not fit all based upon the geographical locations, whether it is urban, or suburban, or wherever you are, rural, the cultural dynamics of the communities where you would probably find it is more prevalent in some areas for specific types of behaviours coming out of abuse, and stuff like that. Have you been able to base your studies on things like that so that you will be able to now guide the social services where it is necessary? Even far more, you can begin to categorize, and scale, as a matter of fact, those areas that may need it even far more than some areas. It may be far more prevalent in some communities than it is, and if the data does not show that, we may find our solutions being misfits in specific areas. Have you been able to do that?

Madam Chairman: If I may add, because it tacks on to exactly what Sen. Samuel is asking, I was going to ask, what informs your priority of topics of research areas?—that kind of thing. So how do you decide that you are going to do this particular topic as opposed to another one?—and that ties in to exactly what you are saying. What data informs that decision?

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: Okay. So I think it is instructive for us to recognize the Children's Authority has not yet been in operation for a year. We are just about, you know, 10 to 11 months old, and, therefore, we are really a very new entity trying to treat with the problems at hand. So it is trying to, you know, it is almost like dealing with, you know, a family with challenging children, so you are trying to deal with the pressures. We are dealing with 5,300 cases; we are under-resourced at this time, and our PS is working very hard to trying to get additional resources for us. Each case that comes to the attention of the Authority has to be investigated.

So at this time what we have been doing, and what we did in preparation actually to be able to churn out this data, so we can get data on a daily basis, but in terms of the level of disaggregation we are going to have to look through and do some more digging. But we have set up a child protection information management system that produces the data. The analysis, however, would have to take place, and will be taking place at a later stage. So whilst we are producing just statistics right now, to draw conclusions or inferences on a nine-month series, as we have said in our report, is really not best practice. It certainly is not, you know, robust. Then the reports we are getting, these are reports of cases, it is only after we investigate and substantiate the report can we get into the level of analysis that Mr. Samuel is speaking about, but, certainly, once we investigate the cases and we have a report then we would be able to do that really. So I think in the next couple of months we should be able to produce some actual studies, but at this time it is about collecting the data that really did not exist.

In fact, when we were trying to set up the Authority, and we were looking at workforce statistics and numbers, and talking to various stakeholders, we were looking at perhaps 1,000, 1,200 cases coming to the attention of the Authority. The police would have been a best source of data, and they had just under 1,000 cases, and so forth. In 10 months we are already over 5,000, right, we are five times the number of cases that would have been projected. So it means the work to treat with the cases right now, and almost half of those cases are high risk.

They are emergency cases, so our resources at this time are focused on responding to emergencies. We have responded to almost 500 emergency cases since proclamation last May, and have had to receive into care more than 120 children. The issue of placement, where do we place these children, that has not disappeared. So we need to be able to find appropriate placement. Whilst the family is the best setting for children, in many instances there are no families, or

the families are not the best spaces for those children, especially in sexual abuse cases where the alleged perpetrator may still be in that environment, and the Authority has a responsibility, mandated responsibility, to protect those children.

Madam Chairman: So, for example, where you would have decided that sexual abuse would be maybe your first area of research?—that would have come about based on—

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: So based on the nine-month and counting research report that we did—based on the nine-month report that we did sexual abuse accounts for most of the cases reported, 23 per cent of the cases reported to the Authority, and when we examine the kind of trauma that these children are experiencing, it is very difficult for us to just leave this area, you know, unattended. The kinds of effects in terms of children, for instance, because a large number of these children, and most of them are girls, although we have seen a significant number of boys as well, they have had to be physically removed from the environment, and I know this is something that, you know, my colleagues have been speaking about in the past, because the alleged perpetrator is still in that space the children are removed.

So we have children who are at our places of safety, and they are re-victimized as it were, since they are almost in, quote unquote, you know, “imprisoned”. They are denied their liberty because, you know, for no reason. It is not their fault. So I think it is important to understand what is driving that, whether they are cultural, you know, notions about it, whether it is happening in different areas, and we are seeing, from the initial reports, that we do have, both in urban and rural areas, the same kind, the same issue. So then what is really driving this? So the research needs to be done, you know, on that. So it is really based on data. It is based on stakeholders. It is based on what we are seeing with the children.

For instance, we have a child at our Child Support Centre who is pregnant at this time, you know, and we now have to treat with that child, placement for this

child. Our place of safety is a temporary space, what do we do with such children? And we have many other cases of children. We have another one who is suicidal after having been sexually abused. There is another one that the police, you know, sent to us, the child was running in front of a car. So the level of trauma that the children experience is really very high. So it is not that we are not doing the other, but because of what we have seen and what our psychologists and social workers have been reporting to us.

Ms. Johnson: Madam Chair, may I just add that there is recognition that there is a paucity of information in the sector to treat with children, and one of the ways that we are attempting to treat with data collection is through the establishment of the children's registry. That is an important technology piece that we are putting in place to map the progress of a child from birth to 18, and, for those at institutions, up to 25. So that will provide us with the critical information that we need at the regional level, at the household level, to make decisions and to devise strategies to treat with this situation.

Mr. Samuel: One of the things I would suggest that you do quickly is to look at the prison population, and out of that data you look at the families that are associated to the prison structure, and then you begin to look at, out of that, the age of the children, and the schools they attend, and set up a monitoring system early because they are practically in the system. And as you begin to monitor them, because this is a realistic situation, if you have 6,000 prisoners divided between male and female then you are able to now have data if possible.

You might not be able to find all the data because of the lifestyles of persons, but those that you can find that are in the school system, and then begin to monitor those children's progress in the school systems so that you can give the kind of support where necessary. Okay? So there is an easy approach, look at the population, look at the offspring of those incarcerated, and then begin to find

where they are in the school system, if they are still at school, and then begin to now set the programmes in place to keep monitoring that as you begin to develop other aspects of programmes overall. That is just a suggestion.

Madam Chairman: At this juncture I just want to smoothly, you know, segue into a question to the Ministry of Education as we are on this and that whole issue. Is there any attempt to proactively do that type of monitoring? I mean, I know that there is an issue of staffing and human resource, but what efforts are made for these types of children? Are there any particular efforts being made to deal with them in a proactive way? Or is it known by the Ministry of Education on your side, is there any information that is gathered that would point you to children who would need that type of monitoring, and maybe proactive approach?

Mr. Seecharan: Thank you, Chair. Let me, first of all, just respond with respect to some information that we have, we do not specifically target students whose parent or guardian are perpetrators or victims. However, part of our strategy, in looking at all students, we do treat with students of those parents. In fact, our Student Support Services Division, in going through the case files preparing to come here, we have identified 283 students that we are treating—have treated with or are treating with. Our process for dealing with student issues is, one, once it comes to the attention of the school we have a process where it is reported forthwith. Forthwith, meaning it comes up the chain, referred to Student Support Services. So that once there is information to that effect, the Student Support Services of the Ministry would intervene.

Just in looking at the data from the 283 we recognize that the majority of that comes from the primary school system, so that for us it suggests that there is a gap in terms of all the possible cases may not be coming to us, and more so at the secondary level where the child may not be displaying symptoms, or recognizable symptoms and, therefore, there is a gap. But there is a process where we treat with

all students, and, within that, students who have been identified are dealt with through the Student Support Services Division.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Seecharan, just for my benefit, and for the benefit of the listening public, last Friday we had a Motion in the House of Representatives on ADHD and there was some debate about the Student Support Services Division, and how it works to catch children with ADHD, all right, but we are talking about something different, we are talking about children with behavioural issues as a result of being witness, or having parents, you know, who are victims to crime, but just explain how the Student Support Services Division, how that operates? How do you proactively catch these behavioural deficiencies? What is the process? How are those reports made?—I mean, we are dealing with tens of thousands of students.

Mr. Seecharan: I would like to pass that question on to the Manager of Student Support Services.

Dr. Bharratsingh: Thank you. At Student Support Services we do address seven educational districts. As you rightly pointed out, there are thousands of children. Our referral process is as follows: if there is a child in the school that is displaying any type of abhorrent behaviour, whether the concern comes up through the teacher, another student, it comes into the school through the parent, we are notified. We are notified through the principal, or the parent would come directly to a student support personnel at the school. They can come into the district office. We have multiple inroads fundamentally where we can actually just be flagged in regard to a child. Once that has happened, depending on the situation of the child, we would either go directly into intervention, meaning that if it is a situation that, for example, an alleged sexual abuse case, our protocols would indicate notifying the police, ensuring the safety of the child, the Children's Authority, CPU, et cetera.

If there are cases of fighting, bullying, we again have a similar sort of protocol. In all our secondary schools we have a guidance officer present who understands and knows how to normalize the situation. We operate on MDT level which brings it up to the district level, and this does not take a very long time. So whatever special that is required on case review we move forward. We actually have a chart we can provide you with in terms of our referral process.

Mr. Mitchell: Okay. So let us talk about post-traumatic stress disorder, do you have persons at school, guidance counsellors, to pick up the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, to flag those complex psychological deficiencies?

Dr. Bharratsingh: Depending on how it presents. If it is coming in the way of what is happening in the school, they will recognize again non-normal, if you will, behaviours, and that, generally, in the education system from teachers to our staff recognizes, what we call non-normal, in terms of the developmental spectrum. For post-traumatic stress, whether it is as a result of some of the shootings, for instance, that, you know, we have had experience in our system and society, we have our psychologists, we have our social workers that immediately go in and deal with the situation.

If I may, just one thing, one of the things that we do address, because we are in the school, once, twice, three times, meaning that before we even get to places of treating on the more extreme, suspension type, cases that are referred to us we have the opportunity to treat with it early so we can try to actually mitigate some of the longer term exacerbations of those behaviours.

Mr. Samuel: I recognize that you oftentimes base everything on what is reported, and there is no proactive mechanism set in place to deal with things before it is reported. Two, there are children who do not show the obvious signs that we think is related to what we are looking for. Here is a child that grows up in a community that hears gunshots every day, their response to that is different. They come to

school and you see them now because that is normal. The impact and the effect on the child is different, and our social workers may not be able to pick it up, and then—because we are looking for a specific type of behaviour.

We are looking at withdrawals, we are looking at aggressiveness, and the child is accustomed hearing gunshots all day, morning, noon, and night, and that no longer affects them, but it has its impact on the child. It has its impact upon what is going on inside of the child, and the child may show it in ways that we are not looking for. And that is why it is important—when the Chair asked, you know, what proactive mechanisms are put in place through the services of the Ministry of Education to now begin to—and I did not want to say target children, okay, but to be able to have some kind of information and assessment that could guide us, because there are children that will not show the obvious symptoms, and a lot of them do not.

You are talking about a population of 17,000, 18,000 children, and you are talking about 200 reports. Please, let us get real, okay? You are talking about a prison population of 6,000 people and you have a few reports, let us get real. Let us stop playing with the thing, and let us begin to realize that what we are doing, we need to stop, revisit it, and then begin to set the necessary things in place. While the grass is growing the horse seems to be starving tremendously, and you would find yourself in far greater difficulties the longer you take to sit and really assess your approach forward, because your approach must be very clinical, and it must be specific to now determine specific things. Okay?

Do not generalize. I am just suggesting that, because I know of children who do not show the—and a lot of them do not show the obvious signs and symptoms of disorder because of where they live, because of the social background, because of the cultural implications and what is taking place, because of family unit structures they will not go and say anything outside of the family. A lot of stuff is

taking place, and if you are not trained to pick it up, and if you do not observe, and specifically observe—you are not talking about targeting them—then you would not be able to do it. I am begging you all, please, there is more to this than meets the eye, and stop basing things on reports, we are not a report-oriented society. We are not, so let us stop basing it on reports.

Madam Chairman: If I may, at this time, introduce two questions that have come from the online viewership. One question asked, what is the average cost of research? I think that probably came out of the allocation that was mentioned by the Children's Authority officials. I do not know if maybe you just want to restate what our allocation is, and if there are within the other agencies, if there are allocations for research maybe at this time you can mention them as well, and also mention the adequacy in your estimation of that allocation.

2.00 p.m.

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: So thus far, we have had \$200,000 released for fiscal 2016, and we have one person in our research unit at the Children's Authority. Grossly inadequate.

Madam Chairman: Are any of the other agencies engaged in research and have allocations?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you, Chair. Just to provide information from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, just to indicate that through this Ministry, we had set up some years ago a research council, Cabinet-appointed committee, responsible for research in the social sector. So that council has been operating probably over three years and what we do is collaborate to determine and to ensure we know what research is being done, not only in the sector but at the university that is related to the social sector. And just to indicate that probably there may be some studies that may have been done on this target group at the university.

Because of that council, too, and because the Ministry has done a number of research agendas in the area of the social sector, we could tell you that generally, on average, the cost of doing research that is similar to this nature, it is about \$200,000 to \$250,000. However, that is just one—

Madam Chairman: That is per study?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Per study, yes. And if it is a study that is dealing with a sample that is much broader, for example, the survey of living conditions, that is about 6,000 households, it is over \$1 million. So that is a sense of the cost of research in the social sector.

Ms. Macintyre: Just to say that the Ministry of Education has an Educational Planning Unit and it has been doing studies, not in this area but on grades and marks which of course, is another indicator of whether there are problems in the home environment. There are two international benchmarking studies that we have been involved in, which are—I would call it by the acronym, I cannot remember the names—PIRLS and PISA where the grades of the children in Trinidad and Tobago are benchmarked against other jurisdictions.

There would be other studies that they are working on but I cannot tie it back to money, but just as my colleague said, you would find that case study type research would be a lot cheaper. From the time you talk a survey, it can be very costly, in excess of a million which is above the PS's limit.

Ms. Johnson: Madam Chair, just to say that we also have a Policy Research and Planning Unit. We have two researchers in there along with some policy specialists, and we draw essentially on secondary data. There is no resources to devote to doing primary research.

Miss Raffoul: Thank you all. I would like to commend you all. I think it is obvious that you all have a deep dedication to serving our nation's youth, and I thank you as a citizen for that. My first question is about strategy. What is

working? What programmes are making an impact? And then I have some other supplemental questions but this is my first because from there, how do we scale these up, how do we collaborate, but the basic question is what is working. Thank you.

Ms. Macintyre: On behalf of the Ministry of Education, I think Dr. Bharratsingh would be the best person to answer that.

Dr. Bharratsingh: Thank you. And actually this ties into Mr. Samuel's question and again for the proactive one, probably was not as clear. One of the things that we do do—let me just get to your question—we have actually conducted initially at the end of 2013 for our Parenting in Education Programme because this is where the importance of community takes place. It is also about the geography. It is also about our strategy for the types of programmes we actually create and implement.

We actually did some focus groups where we looked at all districts, a handful of parents to get a sense as to what some of the concerns were that these parents were having, what were some of the challenges. We did that and in 2014, around March, we started, based on the issues that we were seeing in the schools, based on the concerns that the parents were having, we started what we called the Parenting in Education Programme. They are a series of workshops of which we have done over 350 of them that are targeted specifically to the issues within the schools. When we realized that our concerns are trending towards a particular area, whether it would be things like cutting, we see two, three, again, we put something in there. We try not to let escalation take place.

Last year March, we started at-risk assessments and what this is supposed to do was really screen for potential violent-type behaviours among our young adults. We did a pilot that did about 300 children at that point and again, it was to sense. One of our key, again, is our parenting in education. That is really, really important because that enables us to connect with the parents in terms of their issues, allow

them to have the opportunity to influence, if you will, how we treat with, what we treat with and become that integral partner and collaborator with us. So that one is one of our, I think, success programmes. And we do that: could it be better? Definitely. Do we need to expand it more? Certainly.

You already understand our staffing. We run at approximately one to five in terms of our social workers; one to one in terms of our guidance officers in the secondary; one to 3.6 in terms of guidance in our primary schools, and we operated about one to 12 depending on what you are looking at in special education.

So with that challenge, we are still finding more innovative ways. I think that is what Mr. Samuel was alluding to. You know, it is about how do you think outside the box, how do you build bridges, and how do you begin to address problems, not just whether it is from reports, but still being driven by data, understanding of the community. So that data that you might have seen in terms of what we got for parent/victim, parent/perpetrator that my CEO was speaking about, if you look at that, we recognize distinct profiles for districts and we actually back-pedal to understand what is happening within that socioeconomic space for the violence, and we know because you look at that, and that informs, again, the type of programmes that we put down within those particular communities.

The feedback that we have gotten which we do evaluations for our parenting in education, actually suggest to us that yes, from the parents' perspectives, they have seen changes, not just in the way they parent but in the way their children respond. So we have been having some small inroads in that regard. Thank you.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I want to stay with the education responses. I want to build from my background because you know I want to speak from the perspective of my background in policing, and some of my experiences with schools. You know, I am hearing a lot of talk about counselling, interventions and you know, it sounds good, but for one thing, you know, you speak about building through data and I

want to agree with my colleague here. What data are you building from?

Because most children, the first place of comfort after home is the school and I want to know what is the basis of your intervention. Is it after something happens? Because, for one thing, there is a great amount of bullying taking place in our nation's schools today: fighting, violence and these things are happening because they are modelling what they see in the communities and even at their homes.

And I am really interested in knowing what continuation, what are the bridges that you build, after you do the studies and you have the children at school and you recognize the behaviour pattern. Because I looked at a social media just last week and I actually saw a teacher running from a fight between about three girls and this is the reality. And I think—I am building this because of the question before this august Committee here and it says that we are looking at children whose parents were either a victim or a perpetrator and that child could build anger from either one of the perspectives. Whether their parent was a victim or whether they were a perpetrator, they could have anger built within them.

You know, one looks at responses and one looks at support mechanism and institutions, and I know for a fact, institutions are sadly lacking because as a young officer, I had problems most times in having children placed at institutions. I agree with when you said that an institution is a double punishment because a victim taken from a home, especially in sexual abuses and put into a place of safety, they are being punished twice and the perpetrator remains at the home.

But what I want to ask more importantly this evening is what is the Ministry of Education and social services doing to ensure that we have some kind of behavioural intervention centres established, a behavioural assessment initiatives established to deal with that targeted population. And when I say targeted now, I am not only speaking to the 180 we spoke about earlier who were identified, I am

thinking that from onwards from today, we will be targeting a greater population for intervention.

So I really want to put this to both Ministries, the social and education, as to what is happening, what is the continuation. When a police officer is called, what kind of collaboration, what kind of relationship takes place there to deal with that child, to bring that child from discomfort to comfort, and to bring that child to a position where they could continue to live in that school and be a part of that school.

Ms. Macintyre: Thank you for your input and just to say, I think you have gone where I have tried to hint in my opening remarks. I think we have been responding on either a school or a Ministry type level and not at a—a governance system is not in place to ensure the interagency collaboration that should take place. Dr. Bharratsingh just went through what is one of our main, responding to Mr. Samuel's issue, because what he was suggesting is what whole of school programmes do we have to address and the Parenting in Education would be one such example.

I think before another Joint Select Committee, I made the point—this was the one that was looking at violence and bullying—and you are substantiating what I am saying, that the problem is much bigger. I mean here today, we are looking at victims and perpetrators of crime. But the example I gave to that Committee and if you think back to—in particular, I would say our male siblings or cousins, et cetera—it would have happened with girls to some extent but I think it was even higher in our male population. How many of them have really experienced abuse in the school system? And when I say abuse, I do not mean just corporal punishment, beating, whatever, I mean the way they were spoken to by their teachers in the school environment.

And so I say, many of our young children right now, some of them do not

have parents, as we discussed, do not have fathers, but those that do, can you think of a father that has to go back into a school environment for his child and how he feels when he goes into that environment? I think we have not come to terms with the fact of our school system traditionally, how it has been, the type of emotional graduate you have out of the school system and it cannot be solved by one agency. We have to come together to solve it.

In one particular instance recently that we experienced in education in a particular school, we worked with our external stakeholder, the external stakeholder came in and said, “You are the worst schoolchildren in the country”. When you speak a certain way, you provoke a certain reaction and unless we begin to understand that and treat with it, as I say, inter-agency. Education cannot solve it alone, social development cannot solve it alone, the police cannot solve it alone, we have got to work together.

And as I keeping saying, under that is the data that we talked about and that data has to be able to be pulled up automated. We cannot be going to manual files, takes too long. You talked about 118 victims out of—under certain assumptions, Sharifa spoke about 180, we talked about 283. I should know that the 283—at least I have Sharifa’s 180, we should at least know that, we do not, “we doh talk”. We do not.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thanks. I want to begin by saying we do not have a project on our agenda in terms of behavioural centres but it was something that I remember came up some years ago in terms of those community-based behavioural centres for children who are affected in this way. And we recognise at that time that it would have been a project that we would have to do collaboratively, but even now, even if we are considering it, it will have to be something that we have to discuss with the Children’s Authority given their purview and their mandate. And also to indicate in terms of how we collaborate with the other stakeholders

with regard to the examples that you gave, and I would ask the representative from family services to speak on that. Thanks.

Ms. Winchester: What I can say is that when children are referred to the agency, we provide the counselling, we also provide whatever support is also needed. For the family also, we provide support and we also provide follow-up and whatever else support is needed, we provide that also.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I am referring to these victims and I am talking about victims of—from parents, and you know, I must draw references. Because I remember carrying a young girl, who was also a victim, to a home and there is no follow-up in terms of the counselling, the professionals, the experts in that field. So we have this victim there being punished twice and apart from a police officer visiting, because a police officer must visit every 21 days within that space of time, the counsellors from the school social because she was a schoolchild and there was no process or no strategic approach to how we manage and treat with that child during that process, during that period of stay at a home.

That is why I asked the question of behavioural intervention, behavioural assessment of those children. You know because we speak here, we speak about children where their parents were either a perpetrator or a victim but we also spoke about a child who is also a victim and what kind of treatment we have available for those children when they do get into these situations.

Ms. Winchester: Well, as I said, again, based on the mandate of the social services, we will intervene in the sense of getting the information first, then assessing the situation and then providing the treatment. What I will say also, again, once it comes to the agency, we intervene by way of counselling, we also intervene by way of follow-up. If it seems that we will need some further intervention by another agency, we will also ask for that assistance. But more or less, that is in terms of when children are referred to us.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: So am I to understand that when you have a child from a school and that child is put into a home due to these circumstances, that you do have a follow-up structure in place?

Ms. Winchester: All right, well, in terms of that, right now, we do not deal with children in homes right now. That is under the purview of the Children's Authority.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Moses.

Mr. Moses: Thank you very much, Chair. From what Mr. Seecharan just said, it is perhaps heartening that no particular group of students is under surveillance as such but rather all students attract due attention.

My question is: is there any fear or reservation that an over enthusiastic diagnosis might lead to some distortion in the course of treatment meted out to students? Should I say the Ministry of Education? Thank you.

Ms. Macintyre: I will refer to Dr. Bharratsingh who is the expert in that area. But also, I want to ask her if she could say a little bit about the Learning Enhancement Centres which will address Mrs. Jennings-Smith's question.

Dr. Bharratsingh: Thank you, PS. The Learning Enhancement Centres that we have right now, let me just give you a little brief overview. When the child comes in, we do have a comprehensive assessment that is done. We look at the socio ecosystem of that child from social functioning assessments. We do psychological work-up. We also do the academic profiling of the child. We also do a special education assessment. Fundamentally, what that is, is to enable us to understand the child holistically, where this child is actually functioning at cognitively. We also look at the environment within which the child exists and any risk protective factors that we can consider in terms of moving forward and treating with that child.

The follow-up that you asked about, the programme currently runs

approximately three weeks and we tailor. We have core components in that programme. Everything from a child being able to understand feelings and self which helps with this notion of self-regulation and expression to conflict resolution, communication skills and a core component with the parent always.

As well, we have relationships with some of the stakeholders. Once we have gone through some of the key career-type assessments and academic profiling with the child, so we are actually able to take them on field trips with some of these other key stakeholders to give them that exposure. Once the child exits the LEC centre based on conferencing with school supervision, the parents and all the experts in there, the best recommendation is made, we do have a follow-up process. We have six visits at least. It is every two weeks for at least a three-month period. If the child is recommended outside to an alternative placement, we still follow up with the child, at least once over the next month and at the end of the semester, depending on where it is, to ensure that the child has transitioned. That would be the LEC part.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: I think this question would be directed to the Children's Authority. Does the authority network with hospitals? In the sense that if a child is sexually abused or perhaps physically abused, the child is admitted to hospital and the parent insist that that child be returned to the home and in the case where that parent, himself or herself, is the abuser, what does the authority do? What mechanism is put in place to ensure that that child becomes a ward of the State or that child is not returned to that abusive home?

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: So prior to proclamation, we had a series of sensitization sessions with hospital professionals, with health care professionals rather, across the country, including Tobago, where we sensitized all the stakeholders including doctors, nurses, medical social workers, who are within that hospital setting to our processes.

If you are speaking about sexual abuse, under the mandatory reporting provisions of the Sexual Offences Act, which has been in operation long before the authority, you must report to the police. So doctors are identified as one of the personnel who would have to report to the police. We have also asked them to report to us but we have a very good relationship with the Child Protection Unit and they would refer the cases to us as well. The police, as my colleague, Supt. Lewis, indicated earlier, is responsible for the criminal investigation. So they will treat with evidence and prosecution and treating with the alleged perpetrator. The authority deals with the child in question.

What we have developed, and in fact I wanted to identify, we have all spoken about working together and I think before we end today, we need to move towards implementation, because we talk a lot and we are very short on implementing. There is a draft national protocol for all the agencies that work with children that the Children's Authority has prepared for a couple of months now. We have been engaging stakeholders including health professionals to be able to sign off on this protocol so that we know where the responsibilities of one agency ends and the other would begin, and how that case would be referred to us.

So in the particular case of sexual abuse for instance, once the child is treated at the hospital because the child may need acute medical attention, we simply cannot go in there, and you also have medical social workers who are responsible for the child up to that time. Once that child is cleared in terms of the health professionals clearing that child, the medical social workers will speak to our social workers and that case is referred to the authority. So in terms of the criminal part of the investigations, the police deals with that. In terms of the care of that child, the Authority then takes over.

What the Authority would do in that case where you are saying a parent may be the obstructionist, the Authority will assess the child of course, so the health

assessment would have already been done, we will do the other forms of assessment. We will speak with the medical social worker, they may have information on the case. If there are any gaps in information, our investigation team will complete those gaps and then we take the information, our attorneys will go to court and apply for an appropriate order.

It may be a wardship order and an interim care order where we can now place that child in another setting; it may be a foster care order, a fit person order. We try to go for fit persons to place children within family environments first. We try for foster care orders next, once there is a foster parent available. So only really as a last resort, we will place children in a facility. So that is the process.

We have to convince the judge and we have our applications through the Family Court and they have been very supportive, actually coming out into the middle of the weekend. Last night, we had a judge come out to deal with a case for us for an emergency situation. So we would have to convince the judge that there is enough evidence in terms of the social investigation as well to be able to make that order. So that is the process.

Ms. Macintyre: I just realized that we did not respond to Minister Moses' question. I had asked Dr. Bharratsingh to take it.

Madam Chairman: Over-diagnosis.

Ms. Macintyre: Yes, I do not know if she would have more to say, but I recently saw a BBC programme where, in Norway, many parents are trying to fight the State because the State has almost become like a big brother taking away their children. I do not believe we are anywhere near that, I think we fall short, but Dr. Bharratsingh, I do not know if you want to say anything about precautions against overzealous diagnosis.

Dr. Bharratsingh: Mr. Moses, my apologies for not responding to your question. I would actually, if you do not mind repeating your question so I get the full context

of your question.

Mr. Moses: What I said earlier is that from what Mr. Seecharan had said, no particular group of students was under surveillance as such but rather all students were attracting due attention. So my question was: is there any fear or reservation that, as the Permanent Secretary said, that overzealous approach to diagnosis could lead to a distortion in the treatment that ultimately is meted out to such students?

2.30p.m.

Dr. Bharratsingh: Okay, thank you. No, and I will kind of give you a little brief context why I would move towards saying, no. Regardless of, in this instance, the parent or the guardian being a perpetrator or a victim of a violent offence, one of that is one category. When the child presents to us they do not present with that information in general. All children have a need as identified, whether it is accurate or not, by a teacher, another, you know, adult, whomever it comes from, we begin to treat with that child.

The assessments that we do, there are some that are standardized at the outset, the presenting problem, collecting your demographic information, some of the socio-background, and as soon as we start doing that, then we begin to get a fuller picture and profile, "How many siblings are you? Do you live with your mom or dad? No, mom is in prison. I live with grandma." So we get a piece of information there, and, based on how that begins to unfold, we also then begin to unfold in terms of our assessments and our protocol.

So it is not necessarily a one-fit-all approach, once you realize that children had been abused in different ways there is, again, a slightly, you know, different variation of how we treat with the child, but we do not, at the outset, and that may be, as I am sensing, might definitely be one thing that we need to think about. There are a couple of gaps in, you know, our system, and that may very well be one of them.

Madam Chairman: Okay. I am going to take a question from our online viewership before I ask Sen. Samuel, as well as Minister Mitchell, to give us their questions. The question is addressed to all of the agencies who are here with us, and the question refers to long-term support for our children, and it specifically asks, what happens after the parent becomes involved in the process? So there may be a referral, and so on, if there is no parent around, or that kind of thing, and I imagine a child may be placed in care, what happens after a parent is reintroduced to the process? Is there any long-term monitoring of that child, any support given to that child after to ensure that the parent is doing what they are supposed to do? Or is it that after a parent becomes involved the agencies would drop the monitoring on that particular child? Maybe we can start with the Child Protection Unit to tell us their view on that.

Supt. Lewis: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I can say is that we at the Child Protection Unit we do have follow-up, however, because of our challenges it is not as how we would like it to be, but we do follow up. What we have also is that the community police at the nine units, they assist us also for the moment until our strength is allocated to us. But what I can say is that the support from the parents, sometimes we have a challenge with that, and we have to remind them of their role and functions, and sometimes when we look at the children who are abused it is alarming, it is heart-rending, and we have to remind them that these children are our nation's future and we have to be proactive. So dealing with follow-up, yes, we have been. It is not as we would like it to be but we are working towards it.

Madam Chairman: Could we now have the Children's Authority to respond?

Mrs. Ali-Abdullah: Sure, thank you very much. So if we look at children in care, as we said, the first strategy is always to try to get children back with their families, and our Children and Family Services Unit is the unit that would work with families. We have about 800 cases like that right now where we are working

with children and families. Again, it is resource issues, since we have about 10 people working with those families. We have tried to implement some creative solutions by hiring specialists, by outsourcing to agencies that treat with parenting and family issues. We are trying some family team conferences so that we can treat with larger numbers with similar issues as well. In fact, we are going to start that programme. So those would be children who are returned to their parents.

We also refer to other agencies. There are a number of support agencies, there are a number of NGOs that work with children that we would refer to. The next category would be foster care. There are just about 25 children in foster care that we have inherited, and we have inherited most of them from the pilot system that was in operation. This is an area we really want to expand since a lot of people have come forward to say that, you know, they want to be foster parents, of course, there is screening and monitoring. So those 25 children who are in foster care, and there are about 12 foster providers, they are monitored. There is a small foster care unit, which is three people, but they monitor those children in care all the time. And then the larger group, of course, would be the children who are in the 50 children's community residences across the country, and that is where the challenge is.

The PS will speak about the four major homes, but in terms of the other 46, what we do we have a licensing and monitoring role. So we have just licensed only two homes, thus far, out of the 50 which would have met the minimum requirements for licensing. Our team, or licensing and monitoring team, and then again it is about 10 people, we do unannounced visits, as well as announced visits, at these residences to be able to, you know, really look at what kind of care these children are receiving, and if there are any instances of, you know, abuse, and so on. We do have reports coming in as well anonymously. There are over 300 reports from these children's homes that we are treating with of all types of abuses.

So that care component is important, so our role with the Children's Authority is to regulate the care in the children's home not to provide it, and we are a create of statute of legislation so we have to work according to what the legislation is asking us to do. So our trigger is the reports. When we talked about reporting earlier on, our trigger is really the report, once a report comes to us what we do. So for the children's homes, we license and monitor. What the expectation is that the children's homes would hire staff, so within the standards there is quality of care which would speak to care. So what we found is that most of the homes, in fact, all of the homes would provide, you know, the basic needs, food, shelter, clothing, but when it comes to rehabilitation to the psychosocial support that the children require, that is severely lacking.

The homes do not have the resources to be able to provide that care, and we have been working with our Ministry to try to get the resources. We have proposed a subvention on a cost-per-child basis sometime, I think it was approved, and it is really to get that in place so that the homes can hire. They would tell you they do not have funding, they do not have money to hire people with the qualifications, because you are talking about serious psychosocial care, these children have been severely traumatized. So that is a serious gap in terms of the long-term care.

Finally, in terms of reintegration, so these children who are in care, the idea is always to get them out of care and to reintegrate them with their families. When we started talking with the homes we realized that some of the homes actually prevented families from bonding with their children, because, again, it caused problems after the parents left, the children were very traumatized, and you have one caregiver to look after 20 children, and they would not be able to get that child to settle down afterwards. So it was just easy to say, okay, one visit probably every quarter, and there was a sign that we saw in one where parents were not allowed to visit. Of course that is against, you know, our regulations, and we have been

working with the homes to encourage these visits, in fact, to have a private space where parents could come and continue to visit these children so the children can be reintegrated.

There is also a reintegration plan and a transition plan. For some children, unfortunately, there is nowhere to transition these children to. So I think, again, the placement issue for having facilities, hostels, transition facilities for these children, our data has shown of the 800 and so children that were in care—well, residents, because they are no longer children, more than 100 were residents over 18. So we already are treating with a situation of having these children returned to their families, or to communities, and I think we really need to get communities, other families members involved to be able to take up the slack to really provide support to the State in terms of taking care of our children. Thank you.

Ms. Johnson: Madam Chair, the Ministry's focus right now is ensuring that the national standards for the care and protection of the children are being utilized in all the community residences, all 50 of them. Our focus is on the five large homes, the St. Michael's, St. Jude's, St. Dominic's, St. Mary's. Our national standards are in alignment with that of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. No child in a community resident should be without an individual care plan, and that is where we have been focusing our training to ensure that our care plan teams, which we have created at all the homes, are equipped with the tools necessary to design these plans for children who enter the institutions.

Now we have gone ahead and we have put in psychologists, social workers, educational officers, nurses, social welfare officers at these homes to ensure that these plans can be readied and implemented. So we have—Cabinet has agreed to the employment of all these additional persons, including caregivers to ensure that we maintain the national standard in terms of the ratio of caregivers to children.

Madam Chairman: If I could just interject, I think the question was focusing on

what happens after a child is reintegrated with the family. If there is anything that does—

Ms. Johnson: Yes, and I am coming to that but I am just laying the framework there. All the models that we are using involves an element of reintegration of the children with family, or in a similar setting. So that is part of the care planning for the child. The reintegration is part of that process. Yeah?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So what happens after the reintegration? Is there monitoring after that happens?

Ms. Johnson: The reintegration plans includes an element of the external monitoring when we have reintegrated the child.

Madam Chairman: All right, thanks.

Ms. Macintyre: The Ministry of Education's mandate is once a child is in the educational system then it is monitored. When it moves out of the system, no, hence my concern which was one of the reasons I flagged upfront, because having come to the Ministry I realize the importance, as Mrs. Jennings-Smith said, the school collects data, it has data, and it knows where our future problems could be. When they come out of that system, and we do help to identify, in the case currently with the recent incidents we have had, we try to identify alternative learning strategies to direct them into if they are about to be above the age for the school system. But, admittedly, once they are out of the school system they are lost in the wider population.

Madam Chairman: No further monitoring there?

Ms. Macintyre: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Does Family Services have anything to add here?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I would say that we have had this challenge in terms of the sustainability, and it has to do again with resources so I would prefer to let the Family Services representatives speak to how long they follow up the children

when the children come to them.

Madam Chairman: Yes, very specifically.

Ms. Winchester: To follow up with the children and the family, if support is needed for outside support, like with an NGO, we would provide that engagement with the NGOs. Also too what we will also do is we have some parenting programmes we could refer the parent to the programme whereby they are informed on different topics, et cetera, how to deal with the children, and, as I said again, whatever other support is needed we will provide that, you know, as best as possible.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Sen. Moses—Sen. Samuel, sorry.

Mr. Samuel: It is necessary for me to go back to root cause, and I think we have a base data to work with. I am not too sure how many persons, and I am dealing with now, not necessarily children that are victims, or whose parents were victims of crime, or violent crime, or perpetrators of violent crime. I am talking about children who are victims of whatever type of crime we are talking about, because they show symptoms in different ways. Do we have any kind of statistics, and I probably would ask the police unit to talk about this, with the amount of persons that are imprisoned, incarcerated based on murders, based on people who have been incarcerated for drug trafficking or possession, people who are behind bars for constant use of obscene language, failure to pay child support, and all of these kinds of things, arms and ammunition? And the reason I am asking that is because if we do not have the kind of data based on that each one of these perpetrators, whatever it is, would have either come from a family or effected a family, their children are victims.

If I am constantly incarcerated because I constantly use obscene language, I constantly abuse it, the children are affected, and they show the impact of it in various forms and manners, and if we have that kind of data then we can begin to

be clinical in how we approach support mechanisms across the board, because of victim, of people who are incarcerated because of murder, and that is twofold. It means that that situation has victims on both sides, both the perpetrator, as well as the victim, and it has the families on both sides. And if we do not use those kinds of base data to set programmes and mechanisms in place we will find ourselves in difficulty.

The child whose father is incarcerated because he has been found having narcotics or marijuana, or whatever, may deal with it differently, but they are a victim of a crime, and they now must be dealt with in a specific way, likewise a child who is probably angry that my father has not been paying support for me. They exhibit a different type of behaviour as opposed to the other situation, because their trauma is different. So if we do not have these base data, and we have it, you just have to go into the systems and get it and then begin to clinically work together to find the mechanisms to deal with it. I am just using the base data.

Supt. Lewis: Thank you. In answer to that question, yes, the TTPS has data with respect to what you mention. However, I do not have that with me here now, as we at the Child Protection Unit, what I have is the amount of reports of sexual nature, matters before the court, different types of offences, 18 and under, but if need be that can be provided to the Committee at another time. If you would like that statistics I can have my Inspector, who is in charge of the operations, reveal those at this time.

Mr. Samuel: And not only just 18 and under because they many times are not just perpetrators but they are also victims, and you deal with the young people that are incarcerated at YTC. They too are fathers and mothers, or wherever they are, they are fathers, many of them at that young age, and it means the impact upon their offspring is also something that we need to take into consideration.

Just one thing on that, Madam Chair, I think something needs to be looked

at, because I remember just recently chatting with some children whose behaviour had changed and one young man was very angry because his father was incarcerated—well, he is at Remand Yard, and his anger is, “I cannot get to see my father”. So his behaviour was based on the fact that they are not allowing him to see his father, and he said, “I cannot see my father”. Something needs to be looked at. Maybe that has caused him to behave a certain way. So we have to look at this thing in a holistic way and see how we can come up with the best solution. I know it is tough, but I think we can find solutions for it.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Sen. Samuel. Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Chair, I wanted to bring Mrs. Sampson-Brown into the conversation now, this is the Victim and Witness Support Unit, because I assume that—I mean, in most instances, you all would be the first point of contact with these indirect victims and child witnesses. So, you know, can you take us through the process, you know, do you open case files as it relates to these indirect victims and child witnesses? Do you interact with the other agencies? You know, how do you all go about your work?

Mrs. Sampson-Brown: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, I was wondering if I was in the room. I particularly like the approach that is happening now because I am listening to all the stakeholders present here and I realise how effective the Victim and Witness Support because it actually comes last when everybody would have done everything, the Victim and Witness Support Unit comes last because when the crime is committed, upon whoever, the child, or children, or the group comes to us when the offence is committed. Our unit at times does not have the issue of going into the schools, identifying a child who has behaviour issues. The issue is that the child is a victim, and from that victim perspective then we could branch off to the other agencies like the National Family Services, the Education Ministry, Family Services and Children’s Authority, and so on. A child comes to

us as a victim, she or he witnessed the parent being murdered, when that child comes to the Victim and Witness Support Unit, through the referral of the Homicide Unit, or the Anti-Kidnapping Unit, or whatever unit, they come to us, there is a systematic approach to how we address those children.

The whole issue of the eclectic approach, and we use different models, like we use the trauma incident model. If the child is in trauma we use the trauma incident model. We use the incident reduction model. We use the cognitive behaviour therapy model, because remember we are dealing with a victim who is experiencing, or who is in trauma, and there is need for us to remove that victim, that child from that particular behaviour so that we could address the development of that child. That child, we use different play therapy to address the child. We have children who are victims of rape and sexual offences, they are unable to even speak about the situation, and the trained officers of the Victim and Witness Support Unit would intervene with the various models so that we can have that child in a particular environment and a behaviour to speak about the trauma that they are experiencing.

Support from the Children's Authority, we always seek that; support from the Student Support Services, they also, we seek them, because we cannot, as a Victim and Witness Support Unit, actually be that sole provider. And I listened to Sen. Rodger Samuel when he talked about monitoring and tracking, it is critical that when we do an intervention that the other stakeholders must be available and ready to support the result, when we cannot go a step further that the other agencies could fall in because we do short to medium term.

There are some situations that warrant us to go a little longer than short to medium term. Take for instance the Brasso Seco family, it is two years old, and we are still working with that family because of the relationship that the victim and witness, and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service would have developed with

the family, we are still working with the family. The child is now an adult, she was 16, now she is almost 19, and we are still working with that family. So our intervention sometimes informs how we move forward in respect of dealing with a child who is in crisis. Take for instance the whole issue of the—sometimes we look at—right now to assist the movement of the victim and the children, we have formed nine support groups in all our division. The reason for that is that we have observed that there is a particular behaviour in a particular division.

Take for instance in San Fernando, we have found, through our intervention, that there are several issues or reports involving parenting. So what do we do? We formed a support group so we can have the parents who are perpetrators, the children who are victims of like situation come together so that they can hear and share from one another so that they would be able to assist in their own development because of our short to medium term. In a particular area, again, we have reports where there is extreme sexual behaviour. Now, remember those children come to us after the sexual behaviour has occurred. Those children exist in schools, in communities. Other agencies would have interacted, and what I am saying now is collaboration is critical, and timely collaboration is critical so that we would be able to catch them before they fall through the net.

So the systematic approach that we do as the Victim and Witness Support Unit, when the child come to us as a victim, we do the intervention, and we do the particular model so that we could assist this children, the child to that particular trauma incident behaviour, that trauma incident that that child is experiencing because of the crime that was committed in her presence, or upon him or her.

Mr. Mitchell: Do you have any challenges right now? Can you describe your challenges?

Mrs. Sampson-Brown: Extreme challenges, one—and I hear it and I do not want to say it, but I will spell it, r-e-s-o-u-r-c-e-s—resources is something that we could

never—but you see sometimes it not what you have, it is how you have it, it is how you deal with, because when a child comes to us—okay, I have one person covering the whole of the east, from Matelot to Toco. I have one person, but what if we get 10 reports, do I sit back and say, “Okay, we only have one person?” That cannot happen. We have to go forward with whatever we have, connecting with whoever we have, to deal with it. I would love to have twice the resource I have, twice the physical resource, because, remember, when a child comes to us we have to have that physical space that will allow a child to be able to exercise.

Recently we had an intervention with a child, I would not call the offence but it was deep, and we did the play therapy. We had to do it in an environment in a police station. We did play therapy, and, you know, the child chose a snake, the toy snake, and she took that snake and was able to speak to that snake and address the situation that she or he was confronting, and some of the physical resources that we have in the unit is not adequate, but I have to make it work because we cannot postpone pain.

We are not dealing with an instrument or a machine, or a vehicle, we are dealing with humankind, and when that situation comes we have to find the resource, the time, the energy, and the relevant intervention to be able to move that child who does not have the power to make decision on his or her behalf, who do not have the support, who do not have the physical, who do not have whatever, but depend on the person before us, the police, the National Family Services, the school. They are depending on us so at all times we have to be ready to support that child in that crisis moment.

Madam Chairman: It is said that time does fly when—well, I am not sure if we are having fun, but I think we are having a very fruitful discussion, and so I will, at this time, take the last two questions from the Vice-Chairman and from Sen. Raffoul, and then we will conclude and summarize.

Miss Budhu: Another question for Mrs. Sampson-Brown, how has the Victim and Witness Support Unit been able to measure its achievement of behavioural change, improved family relations, enhanced employability, improved awareness of the client, and clients are better able to cope, are there any statistics available?

Mrs. Sampson-Brown: Thank you, yes, from 2008, when the Victim and Witness Support Unit was formulated, we have had—in 2008 we interacted with 208 persons. In 2015 we have interacted with almost 8,000 victims, and the percentage with children and adults, that is not available for me right now, but we were able to do it through our assessment. We are able to do it by how we assess the work that we do, by evaluation, and I would give you an example. Because of the issue of victim and witness you do not just ask a victim, or you go around with a victim and say, “Are you a victim?” You have to find innovative ways, and we have done two things, and it may be that because the increase in reporting by persons it may be one of the ways, and that is the acronym, AVA, addressing victims anywhere.

3.00 p.m.

We developed that programme where the Victim and Witness Support officers would go out into communities and walk the streets at peak times and distribute our information and our contact numbers. Not saying to the victim or the persons that we meet, “you look like ah victim” but saying to them this is the information. In case you know someone, you can call us. We did that in Sangre Grande, we did that in Arima, we did that in Chaguanas, we did it in San Fernando and we are continuing that outreach programme to inform the public that there is a service available and perhaps, we can do an invisible measurement that persons are coming more to the agencies to access the service because they know that there is something available.

We went to a community in the far east based on the data that we read that it had the highest report of incest and one would understand that that community,

because of the whole cultural geographic situation, it was difficult for persons to actually speak about that so we went into that community and we spent the weekend. We were able to get a hotel and we spent the weekend in the community walking the street, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, finding innovative ways. Not walking to them and say, "Listen, you look like an incest victim" but letting them know that there is a service available and you can come to us anytime or, if not, we can come to you. There was an increase after, how do we measure that stats? We measure it by that innovative way that we go out to communities and sometimes we need to move away from our armchair when you are dealing with victims to be able to get the information, more so like victims of incest and rape.

People do not walk in a station and say, "Listen, I got raped yesterday, what are you gonna to do about it?" But if we provide them with that comfort, that is what we at the Victim and Witness Support, are doing. Providing them with that comfortable space and those professional officers and those innovative ways, then other agencies, perhaps, could measure what we do. We may not be able to measure it because we are providing that innovative, invisible way of reaching out to people without they realizing and we have had more persons coming to us. After our Chaguanas walk, in fact, when we got back to the station, somebody called and say, "May I speak to AVA". AVA is Addressing Victims Anywhere.

You see, we have to go out. Sometimes victims are there—what about those victims who cannot come, who are petrified to come, who cannot afford to come? What about those children who have no phone, who cannot call Family Services, who do not want to speak in the school because they will look as if they are not part of the system? All these situations, we have filtered into the way we do business at the Victim and Witness Support Unit by reaching out to various groups, communities, so that our voice can be heard and that persons can measure. So I can say yes, we have been measuring it by the number of interactions we have had and

the services, the AVA project and the other experience, I do not want to call the community.

Madam Chairman: Thank you and we will take a question from Sen. Raffoul.

Miss Raffoul: Thank you, Chair. I have three questions, they are interrelated; I will try to keep them short. The first two questions are about metrics and effectiveness. So the first one is—and this is for all agencies—of the total number of persons that are referred to you, how many of them received treatment at all? Second, of those who received treatment for trauma, how many of them would you say can effectively heal from trauma in terms of the effectiveness? I do know that healing from trauma is not a bindery yes or no answer, it must be a scale, but how would you say, how many that received treatment are able to at least heal to a place of functioning and feeling of self-worth and some contentment, some ability to heal and live a functional life?

Third question is about structure. We have all said collaboration is the way forward. Do you think it is just greater communication between the different agencies or do you think it is structural changes? And if so, can you give some concrete suggestions that we can help support?

Madam Chairman: Before the responses come in, and this is to all the agencies, so I am going to ask that in the light of the time that we have and we have spent here, if your answer could be very brief and focused. If there are specific details that somebody cannot give, we will accept that answer as well and as you put your recommendations, as brief and concise as you can. Thank you. Maybe we can start with the TTPS.

Supt. Lewis: With respect to the collaboration, we do meet especially with the Children's Authority at least once a month. Witness and Victim Support, as regular as possible, through telephone, everything. What I can say is that we do have an MoU in progress with respect to the demarcation of the different functions of the

separate bodies. We do have a cordial relationship and coming out of that MoU, we will be better able to function together as we have been doing. However, it will be beneficial to all ensuring the safety and security of our nation's children.

Madam Chairman: Do you have any information on the statistics? Like for example, the first part of the question, the number of children that are helped and how effective.

Ms. Lewis: Yes, I will hand over to Ms. Paul to address the statistics.

Ms. Paul: Good afternoon, again. The Child Protection Unit has received 2,123 reports from May last year up to yesterday, April 26th. All these matters are referred to the Children's Authority. The reports could be divided into serious crimes and other summary matters. With respect to serious crimes which are very prevalent, you have sexual penetration where you have 409 cases reported to us; sexual touching 167, and you have incest, so far, 22 reported cases. So with respect to serious crimes, you have 598 reported cases and we have 351 matters before the court arising out of these reports thus far.

There are other reports like summary matters, child neglect, physical abuse, meeting after sexual grooming. These matters are also before the court but I am just speaking about the prevalent matters. And sexual penetration, of these cases, it represents 45 per cent with sexual touching 18 per cent, incest so far 7 per cent, and what I can say is that in these matters, we had a total number of 60 males were the victims and 538 females were the victims in these serious matters.

Supt. Lewis: Just to add with respect to what the unit has embarked on, we have continuous training for the officers in various areas with respect to investigations. We have embarked on continuous training because, you know, we work day and night and we work round the clock and the slightest flaw, all the hard work goes down, where is the justice. So the Commissioner of Police has given us the okay to continue training, and as from early next week, continuous training.

Interviewing victims as well because, right now, there is a particular matter where that child is so traumatized that he cannot speak and I say he because it is a report of sexual penetration, and he has to be counselled and then. Especially with respect to the perpetrators, there are certain things we must do. We must observe the judges' Rules and things like that and we liaise with the legal unit as well as the DPP. So training is continuous and if we can do this much, if given additional resources, we can do much more in securing our nation's children.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. The Children's Authority, your basic figures.

Ms. Ali-Abdullah: Sure. Just very quickly, so of the 5,300 cases, we have about 2,000 cases that are under investigations. We have taken the children through the process of assessment and produced about 300 treatment plans. Now, those treatment plans are detailed treatment plans that are developed after the clinical interviews and evaluation by the doctor, psychologist, social worker. These treatment plans are given to either the foster parent, the child in care or if the child is going back home which really identifies that treatment. So it is really about implementing those treatment plans. We have had specific cases where we have seen real success and the time will not permit going through those but you will be hearing some more of those soon.

The whole issue of monitoring and evaluation is integrated within our system and we are in the process of revising our strategic plan and developing KPIs. So we do have the metrics for each area so that we can measure our effectiveness and our performance, and that is very important for us to be able to, I think, advocate for resources, especially in these economic times.

In terms of the structure for the collaboration, we have all spoken about that and I think it is critical that we implement. We have developed, like I said, this protocol. It is called a Guide to Key Stakeholders, Police, Health, and Care Professionals, Educators. It includes all the stakeholders sitting around the tables

today and there is a proposal, there is a suggestion as to how it can work. I can make this available to the Committee. We did not submit it last week because we really wanted to review it. We have been having meetings. In fact, tomorrow, we have meetings with the medical social workers, there is a question about that; a follow-up meeting. We meet with Tobago on Monday. We are meeting with Student Support as well tomorrow. And these are follow-up meetings. We really need to put the structure into place.

This would, however, treat with children mainly in need of care and protection, but I think there is need for a wider collaboration to address some of the other issues that have emerged, but we need to have a structure in place. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. Little Grenada has a multi-agency protocol, a national protocol that they have rolled out. So I think we can learn from the experiences of other countries and really put that structure into place and get a driver, whether it is the Ministry or the Children's Authority or whoever, but somebody needs to take responsibility. And we need to have regular meetings. Once a month, we must meet because things—we get busy, things fall off the radar and then we have issues emerging. We have meetings, like the police said, we have instituted monthly meetings since Superintendent Lewis came on the job and that has proven to be very effective. We, perhaps, need to meet more often given the number of cases.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Johnson: Madam Chair, I would just like to add that we did start a process to treat with a governance structure to collaborate last year and I think we would have to revisit that in terms of coming up with something that we can take to Cabinet for consideration.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Ministry of Education.

Ms. Macintyre: Of those referred, I would say that 100 per cent are treated. Some of them may not want to continue in the system but we do continue to try to follow

up with them to ensure they are in the system. How many reached a place of healing, I cannot give you figures or percentages, but we have had feedback reports, student reports: improved coping, resilience and social functioning; improved parent and child relationships, positive impact and overall family interaction and development, a decrease in anti-social behaviours and improved performance at school.

Structure, I have hinted previously, need for governance mechanisms. I would say both at the macro and the micro level. At the micro level, we have been for a very long time talking about introducing a case management system that would span many agencies, not just social development. But as I said, it would allow, for example, where a social worker is dealing with a case on a particular child and there are other matters that impact, whether it is the father is in prison, the mother is a prostitute, other siblings are in—all that data would be there and you would be able to bring together the specialist to look at the situation from the point of view of moving that family or that child towards a coping situation and being a productive member of society.

But when that is happening, you may be seeing constraints in the system or things that need to be addressed and which is where that has to feed up to the macro level and how we govern the entire system. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Ministry of Social Development.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Madam Chair, we do have some statistics but it is not broken down in the form that is being requested, in terms of the number of children out of those who we have treated by the National Family Services Division, yes. But probably the representative, Ms. Winchester, could speak to that, and she may also be able to speak to the success with respect to healing and restoration with the child that they have treated with. In terms of structure, we look forward certainly to the implementation of the protocols which we have been discussing for a number

of years now.

Ms. Winchester: We do not have figures for the children right now. In terms of treatment and follow up, after you follow up with them, we can safely say that most of them could return to that period of healing and functioning because parents will tell you, well, listen, the children, they are doing better, they are showing respect, they are managing their issues, and even when you intervene with them in that follow-up session, you really see that kind of improvement. I have seen parents afterwards, like on the street, and they would say, well, listen, since I or maybe another social worker intervened, they have been helped and have returned to that normal state of functioning.

In terms of setting up with the other agencies to collaborate, yes, that is needed because sometimes there could be duplication. I know that, yes, the other agencies like Victim and Witness Support, the schools, they do their part, yes, but we really need to collaborate on the way forward for our children.

Madam Chairman: I want to thank Sen. Raffoul for that question because what it has done is allowed us in a sense to give our closing remarks, as well as address the very important issue of the effectiveness of what we do. At this time, I would just like to summarize and maybe to point out some of the things that have come out. Some of them may be a little bold but I am going to say them as they have come.

At this time, based on our enquiry which dealt with the support programmes and services for children whose parents or guardians were the perpetrators or victims of violent offences, there seems to be no specific programmes which caters for the needs of children, these types of children, at this point in time.

There are also no direct local studies which are done on such—this particular group of children. These children are dealt with as a part of the whole and they only receive attention if they begin to display or show disruptive or

unusual behaviours within the systems. In addition to that, regardless of the foreign research which shows the effects of violence on children and the effects of incarcerated parents and children, we do not, at this time, have a proactive approach to addressing the needs of this specific group.

The different agencies which all deal with children's rights and safety, they have no access at this time to a database of children specific information which deals with these at-risk children, these and others, and they do not generally share information, best practices, in a formal way at this time. Again, they do not all meet regularly to discuss challenges, development, trends and solutions. So this seems to be what has come out based on the written submissions and what we have spoken about. And also have come some recommendations and some suggestions that can improve the situation for collaboration. I think everyone is saying that we need more collaboration and a formal mechanism by which that collaboration takes place, with set meeting times and an inter-ministerial whole of the government approach.

Also, we are seeing that there is a posture of data that is acknowledged based on this type of situation and that we need to increase the data collection, the data analysis and also we have to move towards being able to collect quantitative data. I think we have had a lot of qualitative and anecdotal but we need to move towards collecting some quantitative data that we can get some statistics on.

With respect to monitoring and evaluation, we have all agreed that it needs to be more robust. Not that it does not exist but we can strengthen those systems. Human resources and financial resources seem to be inadequate in most cases and in terms of a research agenda, we need more. We need specific areas that we can focus on so that we can get the data that would address specific problems within our society. So I think that we agree that this particular group of children, the focus on them is necessary, something that is critical and can have far-reaching benefits

for our nation going forward.

So I really want to thank the agencies for bringing their representatives out, for your participation, your honesty in terms of your challenges and what you would like to see your institution move towards. Also, we would like to thank the media who are here with us, the observers who are here with us, and the viewing and listening audience, especially those online who would have submitted their questions and their queries. I want to thank them very much for that. I really at this point want to look forward to what comes out of this and the recommendations that can benefit the children of our nation and the nation at large because they are our future, so I want to thank you. Members of the Committee, thank you again, representatives of the agencies and I declare this meeting now adjourned.

3.22 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*