Walking in the Darkness
Walking in the Light
A National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women

by Debra J. Lewis

for the Women’s Department
Ministry of Human Development
And Social Transformation

June 2009

We must unite. Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government.

The time to change is now. Only by standing together and speaking out can we make a difference.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon
UNite to End Violence Against Women
U.N. Secretary-General’s Campaign to End Violence Against Women
## Contents

Executive Summary ...................................................................................................................... 2  
1. A National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women ......................... 3  
   1.1. Methodology .................................................................................................................. 4  
2. The Regional Context ........................................................................................................... 5  
   2.1. The Administration of Justice ........................................................................................ 6  
   2.2. Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS ....................................................................... 8  
   2.3. Men and Masculinity ...................................................................................................... 9  
3. The Belizean Framework .................................................................................................... 12  
   3.1. International Commitments ......................................................................................... 13  
      3.1.1. CEDAW ............................................................................................................... 13  
      3.1.2. Convention of Belem Do Para ............................................................................. 15  
      3.1.3. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action .................................................. 17  
      3.1.4. The Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals ....................... 18  
      3.1.5. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality ..................................... 19  
      3.1.6. Other Commitments ............................................................................................ 19  
   3.2. Policy Documents ........................................................................................................ 20  
      3.2.1. National Gender Policy (2002) ............................................................................ 20  
      3.2.4. Other Policy Documents ...................................................................................... 25  
   3.3. Law and Legislative Reform ........................................................................................ 26  
      3.3.1. Violence by Intimate Partners ............................................................................. 26  
      3.3.2. Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls ......................................................... 28  
4. Violence Against Women in Belize ..................................................................................... 30  
   4.1. Common Themes ........................................................................................................ 32  
   4.2. Systems Response ..................................................................................................... 34  
      4.2.1. The Police ........................................................................................................... 34  
      4.2.2. The Courts ........................................................................................................... 37  
      4.2.3. Health Care Services .......................................................................................... 40  
      4.2.4. Social Services and Psychological Support ........................................................ 41  
      4.2.5. The Education System ........................................................................................ 42  
   4.3. The Women’s Department .......................................................................................... 43  
   4.4. Work with Men ............................................................................................................. 45  
   4.5. Civil Society Response ................................................................................................ 46  
   4.6. Ending Violence Against Women in Belize ................................................................. 50  
5. The Way Forward: Guiding Principles ............................................................................... 52  
6. Recommendations .............................................................................................................. 52  
   Annex 1: Programmes Addressing Violence Against Women in Belize ............................ 58  
   Annex 2: Legal and Policy Changes since 1995 .................................................................. 60  
   Annex 3: International Plans, Declarations and Conventions ............................................ 61  
   Annex 4: Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 62  
   Annex 5: Terms of Reference ............................................................................................. 65
Executive Summary

Violence against women and girls is a global phenomenon. It happens every day, every hour, and every minute. It is an infringement of women’s fundamental human rights. It not only affects women who are battered, raped or sexually abused, it affects all women. It has serious economic and non-economic costs for society.

This document presents a review of actions to end violence against women in Belize. It focuses attention on the two most prevalent forms of this violence: physical, psychological and economic violence against women by intimate partners; and all forms of sexual violence.

Input to the review came from these sources: a literature review of documents relevant to Belize as well as selected regional and international documents; interviews with key informants; three focus groups with representatives of the systems who respond to violence against women, women’s advocates and survivors of violence; and community consultations designed to improve understanding of the situation of Maya women and to hear women’s concerns about the response to sexual violence.

The review sets out the Belize framework for actions on violence against women, including international commitments, national policies and plans, and laws and legislative reform. It reviews the situation of violence against women in Belize, including the response of both public sector systems and civil society organizations. It also highlights the leading role of the Women’s Department in work against violence against women, especially domestic violence.

To provide direction for future actions, the review outlines a set of seven guiding principles for all work on violence against women. These include the need to understand the roots of violence against women in a system of gender inequality and women’s subordination; to prioritize the safety and security of women and children in all programmes; and to guarantee victims’ confidentiality. In addition, each system (including police, courts, health care services, social services and the education system) should develop its own plan for responding to violence against women and take full ownership for the implementation of these plans. Ensuring a fast and effective police response, assured by mechanisms for external oversight is key. Civil society has a critical role to play in advocacy for individual women and in advocacy for changes in public sector policies and practice. Government must have the political will to take action on violence, and must demonstrate that will by providing the human and financial resources necessary for an effective response.


The title for this review, Walking in the Darkness, Walking in the Light comes from the contribution of a member of the Toledo Maya Women’s Council. A survivor of domestic violence, she described the importance of connecting with other women, participating in training, and becoming more empowered as a woman. She said,

Not being educated is like walking in the dark. Getting educated is like walking in the light. Now I’m walking in the light.
1. A National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women

Violence against women is an epidemic in Belize and around the world. Based on a review of 50 surveys, Amnesty International estimates that at least 1 in 3 women are beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime, and that up to 70% of female murder victims are killed by their male partners.\(^1\) Women are more at risk of rape and domestic violence than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria.\(^2\) While no research has been done in Belize to assess the number of women who have been victims of gender-based violence, the experience of those working in both the public sector and civil society organizations confirms that this is indeed a serious issue in Belize.

As many observers have pointed out, violence against women constitutes a serious infringement of women’s fundamental human rights. In many cases, it prevents women from exercising other basic rights, such as the right to work or the right to freedom of speech. It has serious consequences for women’s health, including putting them at higher risk for the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It sentences many women to lives of fear and hopelessness.

Violence against women not only affects those women who are directly victimized by it; it affects all women. Women know they are systematic targets of violence and abuse, and this often influences their choices of where they can freely go and how they should behave. The harassment and veiled threats that women face on a daily basis are a reminder that all women are potentially vulnerable.

In addition to its effects on women, gender based violence has significant costs for society as a whole. The UN Millennium Project has outlined four types of costs\(^3\):

- **Monetary costs** refer to the monetary value of goods and services used in preventing violence; treating victims and apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators.
- **Nonmonetary costs** include increased suffering, illness and death; abuse of alcohol and drugs; and depression.
- **Economic multiplier costs** refer to the broader economic costs and include increased absenteeism; decreased labour market participation; reduced productivity; lower earnings, investment and savings; and lower intergenerational productivity.
- **Social multiplier costs** refer to the impact of violence on interpersonal relations and quality of life, and include the effect on children of witnessing violence; a reduced quality of life and reduced participation in democratic processes.

Understanding the serious implications of violence against women for its victims, for women as a group, and for society as a whole leads to the conclusion that ending violence against women is a moral, social and economic imperative.

---

\(^1\) Statistics quoted from Amnesty International UK website.
\(^2\) UNite to End Violence Against Women Fact Sheet 1
\(^3\) Task Force on Gender Equality, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*, pp 124-125
This *National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women* is part of a larger project to improve the response to violence against women\(^4\). The objectives of the review are to analyze the current situation; to identify factors that contribute to reducing or increasing violence; to examine institutional changes in the response to violence; to review existing services provided by both state and civil society organizations; to identify gaps in state policies and programmes; and to identify strategies, focuses and alliances which could guide the development of a national action plan.

This review focuses on two forms of violence against women and girls:

- physical, psychological and economic violence against women by intimate partners, and
- all forms of sexual violence against women and girls, whether perpetrated by partners or others

### 1.1. Methodology

The methodology used for the assessment was intended to maximize input from all those involved in the response to violence against women, using these methods:

- **Literature Review**: The literature review considered documents looking at violence against women in Belize as well as some regional and international publications that situate Belize’s experience in the wider context. In addition, statistics on gender based violence were examined, including those compiled by the Ministry of Health and the Belize Police Department. One observation coming from the literature review is the lack of research and analysis on violence against women in Belize. Specifically, there has been no survey of the extent of this violence. A bibliography of sources consulted in the literature review is included in Annex 4.

- **Interviews with Key Informants**: Interviews were conducted with informants well situated to provide a perspective on the response to violence against women. These included individuals from the Women’s Department, UNICEF, the Community Counseling Centre, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Toledo Maya Women’s Council, Mary Open Doors (women’s shelter), the Ombudsman, and the management of Anglican schools. Interviews lasted from one to three hours, and in some cases were followed up by telephone or e-mail communication.

- **Focus Groups**: Three focus groups provided a range of input to the assessment. A *Systems* focus group included representatives of institutions and services responding to violence against women.\(^5\) A *Women’s Advocates* focus group included those involved in supporting victims of violence, including providing support

---

\(^4\) This larger project is entitled *Strengthening State Accountability for Ending Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean*. It is supported by UNIFEM and being implemented in several other Caribbean countries as well as Belize.

\(^5\) This focus group included individuals from the Belize Police Department, Family Court and district Magistrates, Department of Human Services, Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital, the Community Counseling Centre, Belize Family Life Association and the Women’s Department.
in their dealings with the police, courts, health care system and social services.\(^6\) A Survivors focus group was conducted with participants from the Dangriga Women’s Support Group and POWA (Productive Organization of Women in Action), including many survivors of both rape and domestic violence. Focus groups lasted three to four hours. In some cases, follow-up consultations took place by e-mail, telephone or personal contact.

- **Community Consultations**: In addition to the focus groups, consultations were held with three community based groups to gain input on particular concerns relevant to the review. These consultations were somewhat less structured than the focus groups and assessed the women’s knowledge of available services, the accessibility of those services, and the level of confidence that those services will respond to their needs. Two of these consultations were conducted with women’s groups in the Toledo villages of Jalacte and Pueblo Viejo and were designed to assess the particular needs of Maya women.\(^7\) Another consultation took place with the Belize City based group Women’s Circle. This consultation focused specifically on the issue of sexual violence and included a number of survivors of rape and sexual assault. Each community consultation lasted from one and a half to two hours.

In addition to these methods, information and comments were also solicited by telephone and e-mail, including with the Ministry of Health, PAHO and the Police Department.

Several important criteria guided the choice of individuals for interviews and focus groups. First, *input from survivors of violence was critical to the review*, reflecting the principle that those most directly affected by the issues should have a strong voice in developing the response. This input was generated by the Survivors focus group and community consultations, supported by the Women’s Advocates focus group. In addition, the review recognized the need to insure input from both urban and rural areas. This input was generated by the selection of Dangriga (Stann Creek district) for the Survivors focus group, by the inclusion of Women’s Development Officers from all six districts, POWA and Mary Open Doors (Cayo district) in the Women’s Advocates focus group; by the inclusion of police and magistrates from both Belize City and the districts in the Systems focus group; and by a field visit to the Toledo district for interviews and community consultations.

### 2. The Regional Context

UNIFEM Regional Programme Director Roberta Clarke has said,

\(^6\) This focus group included the six district level Women’s Development Officers from the Women’s Department, as well as NGOs working in this area – Haven House (women’s shelter), Mary Open Doors (women’s shelter), Youth Enhancement Services (an organization working primarily with teenage girls), POWA (Productive Organization for Women in Action) and WIN-Belize (Women’s Issues Network of Belize).

\(^7\) In addition to the group consultations, individual discussions were held with the Women’s Empowerment Officer of Help for Progress, who works with women in Jalacte and Pueblo Viejo and 5 other villages in the most remote part of the Toledo district.
We know that the Caribbean is an unsafe place for women. Several Caribbean countries have amongst the highest homicide rates and all have higher than global averages of sexual violence, with three countries having amongst the top ten highest rates.

It is within this context that women and women’s organizations have been working for an improved response to violence against women and for a change in the power relationships between women and men that provide the breeding ground for this violence.

A 2005 regional assessment of actions to end violence against women in the Caribbean\(^9\) provided an overview of the situation across the region as well as in-depth country assessments in Dominica, Jamaica and Suriname. The review acknowledged the difficulty in assessing the extent of violence against women, partly because many women do not report incidents due to shame, fear or the expectation of a poor response from the agencies dealing with their complaints. In addition, the process of data collection and analysis has been inconsistent at best. Nevertheless, the report concludes that “studies undertaken in a number of countries suggest that a high level of women in unions in the region have experienced some form of domestic abuse”\(^10\). A review of gender-based violence by the World Bank cited data from 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean indicating that up to 69% of women had been physically abused by an intimate partner, and up to 47% had been sexually assaulted by a partner.\(^11\) A study of sexual violence in Jamaica found that sexual assault was the second highest cause of injury for women.\(^12\) The study also documented a pervasive culture of sexual harassment, leading directly and indirectly to violence.\(^13\)

Roberta Clarke has concluded that, although statistics on rape [and other forms of violence against women] are unreliable indicators of the incidence of gender-based violence, “the statistics available are reason for concern if the pervasiveness and social acceptability of violence against women throughout the region are taken into account”.\(^14\) While more work needs to be done to develop more reliable indicators and consistent data collection methods, the undeniable conclusion is that violence against women in the region is a serious issue putting the lives and well-being of women at risk.

### 2.1. The Administration of Justice

In 2003, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (ECLAC/CDCC) collaborated with the Canadian International Development Agency/Gender Equality Programme (CIDA/GEP) to convene a **Regional Conference on Gender Based Violence and the Administration of Justice**. The

---

\(^8\) UNAIDS, *Challenging violence against women a key task for newly launched Caribbean Coalition on Women, Girls and AIDS*, 6 March 2009

\(^9\) UNIFEM/ECLAC, *Eliminating Gender-Based Violence, Ensuring Equality*

\(^10\) ibid, p 4


\(^12\) Amnesty International, *Sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica: “just a little sex”*, p 3

\(^13\) ibid, pp 9-11

\(^14\) Cited in Kamala Kempadoo with Andy Taitt, *Gender, Sexuality and Implications for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean: A Review of Literature and Programmes*, p 16
objectives of the conference were two-fold: firstly, to review the justice system responses with specific focus on police training and supporting social services, and secondly to develop an integrated plan on gender-based violence with particular attention to the justice system.\textsuperscript{15}

In the course of their deliberations, speakers and participants and the conference made a number of important observations, including the following:

- Mr. Keith Renaud of the Caribbean Association of Commissioners of Police acknowledged the challenge overcoming the traditional responses and attitudes of the police to domestic violence. He explained that the persistence of the traditional response by police is rooted in historical views concerning the role of women as property and the characteristic of submissiveness they are expected to possess.\textsuperscript{16}

- Based on her experience in Guyana, Dr. Janice Jackson addressed the problem of the lack of ownership of police training programmes on domestic violence by the police.\textsuperscript{17}

- Participants in the conference noted that in small Caribbean countries, police officers are often reluctant to arrest perpetrators of gender-based violence who happen to be family and friends.\textsuperscript{18}

- An invited expert to the conference, Staff Sergeant Kai Lui outlined the mandatory charge policy that has been key to the success of the Domestic Violence Unit of the Ottawa Police Force (Canada). This policy ensures that, in all instances of domestic violence, a charge must be laid where there is reasonable evidence to do so. This approach removes the onus from the victim to lay the charge.\textsuperscript{19}

- Ms. Ann Peters, Director of the Legal Aid and Counseling Clinic in Grenada stressed the importance of counseling and the provision of basic needs such as safe accommodation, medical attention and financial support for victims of gender-based violence. These services are best provided as part of an integrated network of services and support.\textsuperscript{20}

- Participants in the conference stressed that batterers intervention programmes have a responsibility to ensure that the victim is safe and not being abused.\textsuperscript{21}

All of these issues are relevant to the development and implementation of responses to violence against women in Belize.

Three working groups were formed at the conference to develop recommendations in these areas: Developing guiding principles for victim and batterers intervention programmes;

\textsuperscript{15} Given the particular focus of the conference on police training and other issues directly related to police response, it is significant that Belize was one of only two countries who did not include representation from the Police Force as part of its delegation.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{ibid}, p 3
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{ibid}, p 5
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{ibid}, p 7
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{ibid}, p 11
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{ibid}, p 13
Strengthening police training; and Developing police response protocols. Some of these recommendations included:

- In batterers’ intervention programmes, monitoring and supervision of facilitators, participants and the programme is important. Furthermore, contact should be made with the victim to provide support and monitor the progress of the perpetrator.
- Counseling for victims of gender-based violence should be funded by government agencies.
- There should be clear sanctions for non-compliance with policing guidelines.
- There should be ongoing training and sensitization in gender-based violence for police officers of all ranks, including senior officers. In addition, there is a need for constant briefing sessions for front-line workers to remind them of the protocols taught in training.
- Police protocols should include a mandatory arrest policy where there are reasonable grounds for an arrest.
- The actions and responses of police officers in the area of gender-based violence should be monitored by all stakeholders, including women’s organizations.

Police response to violence against women continues to be a major area of concern in Belize and throughout the Caribbean. Other initiatives to address this violence are likely to have limited effect if women believe they cannot access justice through reporting incidents of violence to the police.

### 2.2. Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS

The Caribbean region has the second highest rate of HIV infection in the world after sub-Saharan Africa, and the rate of infection of women in the region is increasing. There is a clear link between violence against women and increased risk of HIV infection.

A report prepared for the UN Commission on Human Rights describes the types of violence that women commonly experience and how these expose them to greater risk. These include the following:

- Rape and sexual assault take away women’s control over when, with whom and how they have sex, significantly increasing their risk of HIV.
- In the domestic setting, physical violence is often accompanied by sexual abuse, making it difficult, if not impossible to have safe sex. Consequently, even in marriage and long term relationships, safe sex may not be possible. Intercourse within marriage may not be consensual; whether protection is used and what kind is often decided by the man.
- Even when not physically forced, women who are expected by their social norms to provide sex as their marital duty may feel coerced into sex by their husbands.

---

22 A complete list of the recommendations made at the conference can be found in the conference report, pp 13-17
Violence is used as a means of controlling women’s sexuality and may be perceived as normal, even by women.

- Many women do not feel comfortable talking about sex with their partners or may stop using protection when involved in a long-term relationship as a sign of trust and faithfulness. Sometimes even the suggestion of using protection will be seen as an accusation of the husband’s infidelity, or an admission of adultery on the part of the woman herself. Such implications may provoke violence towards women and prevent them from speaking up, despite the fact that male infidelity within marriage is a major risk factor for married women.

- Girls may also be coerced into early and short-term sexual relations by men known in some societies as “sugar daddies” who are usually more than 10 years older than their partners. These men entice girls with necessities such as food, money or school fees, or luxuries such as expensive gifts, in exchange for sex. Because such men are unlikely to use protection, they put young girls at risk of contracting HIV.

- Feminized poverty and women’s lower socio-economic status are directly connected to their work in the sex industry. Women usually enter the sector because they lack assets and marketable skills, or because they are coerced or tricked into prostitution. So-called “transactional sex” describes a range of sexual interactions women may enter into in which sex is “bartered” in return for goods. In all of these circumstances, women lack the power to negotiate safe sex.\(^{23}\)

In March 2009, a meeting to launch the Caribbean Coalition on Women, Girls and AIDS (CCWA) was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The Coalition acknowledged that sexual violence against women and girls in the Caribbean is pervasive, citing a regional study that indicates that 47% of adolescent girls’ first sexual experience is “forced” or “somewhat forced”\(^{24}\). As a result, it is impossible to address the increased vulnerability of women to HIV in the region without incorporating strategies intended to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, violence against women.

### 2.3. Men and Masculinity

Efforts to protect and empower women are central to addressing gender-based violence. However, the recognition that this violence is ultimately a function of male behaviour raises questions of why so many men engage in violent and abusive acts and what can be done to stop them.

Violence against women is built on the foundation of the unequal power relationship between women and men. Historically, laws relating to marriage, as well as those dealing with rape and sexual abuse, were based on the notion of women as property and were designed to protect the interests of husbands and fathers rather than the women themselves. Social and cultural practices reinforced this view of women as subordinate to men. While some changes have

---


\(^{24}\) Cited in UNAIDS, *Challenging violence against women a key task for newly launched Caribbean Coalition on Women, Girls and AIDS*, 6 March 2009
occurred in the legal and social status of women, deeply ingrained beliefs about the rightful position of women and men in our society provide the environment within which many men use violence as a means of exerting power over women. Any successful strategy for change must recognize that men’s violent behaviour is the logical extension of a social system based on women’s subordination.

Some people have looked to “male marginalization theory” to explain the apparent increase in violence against women. This theory was put forward by Errol Miller, Professor of Teacher Education at the University of the West Indies in his book *Marginalization of the Black Male: Insights from the Teaching Profession* (1986) followed by *Men at Risk* (1991). Miller claims that black Caribbean males have been marginalized by role reversal in households, boys’ declining participation and performance in the educational system, and by the decrease in men’s earning power relative to women’s, especially in the white collar occupations.

Those wanting to shift attention away from the real experiences of women’s subordination have been quick to take up the “male marginalization” mantle as a way to obscure the ongoing realities of gender inequality. However, as Eudine Barriteau of the University of the West Indies Centre for Gender and Development Studies points out, there is little support for Miller’s thesis. She says,

> Several public commentators and Men’s Rights advocates have accepted [Miller’s] assumptions and premises as given and contributed analyses based on his foundational arguments, but they have not tried to devise an explanatory framework for male marginalization.25

In other words, some individuals and organizations have used Miller’s “theory” to support their own agenda without providing the evidence that male marginalization indeed exists. While there have been some advances for women in the Caribbean in the past few decades, it is women, not men, who continue to suffer the consequences of gender inequality. For example, women continue to earn less than men, to have higher levels of unemployment, to be targets for violence and abuse, and to be seriously underrepresented in the political process. Yet women’s rights activists in Jamaica have noted the tendency of government to focus on male marginalization, “leaving aside the vast domain in which women remain significantly underrepresented, such as employment and politics”26.

Others have situated Miller’s thesis in the context of a backlash against the advances made by women in the past two decades. One such observer points out,

> The problem with this argument is that it constructs men as victims of the women’s movement. The “men as victims” argument is associated with a counter movement to reassert the dominance of men and masculinity. The suggestion is that the problem is that men are unable to fulfil their role because women are too ambitious.27

Arguments stemming from the male marginalization thesis are dangerous because they inevitably lead to the conclusion that men must be restored to their “rightful place” in the family

26 Amnesty International, *op cit*, p 12
27 Nurse, Keith, *Feminism and Masculinity* p 1
and society – in effect, reinforcing the power relationships that are lead to violence against women. One analyst has warned that we need to be wary of the implications of the “coded messages” that call for returning men to their rightful places as heads of households. He points out that this insistence is often a call for the reinstatement of patriarchal domination at the domestic level. He continues…

There is nothing wrong with wanting to play a more active role in family life and in the affairs of the domestic sphere. There is something fundamentally wrong, however, with a yearning for retrospective illusion, about the way we never were, when the rule of men in society and in the household was paramount, and beyond question. These calls are not about creating a new sense of justice in the public sphere; they are about using the language of family to place it firmly in the control of patriarchal rule. Both women and progressive men should struggle against the invidiousness of this development.28

Clearly, the male marginalization theory not only falls short of explaining the issues facing both men and women, it has the dangerous consequence of reinforcing those power relationships that lead to the subordination of women and, in the end, to gender-based violence.

While the male marginalization theory should be rejected as providing a framework for understanding events of the past few decades, this does not mean that the issues and concerns facing men today should not be taken seriously. Some of these issues include the rising use of violence in both the community and in the family, the increasing involvement of boys in this violence, the alienation of some boys from the school system, and the pressure on men to provide for their families in hard economic times. These issues should indeed be addressed, but we should do so using a framework that does not ignore the realities of gender discrimination and women’s subordination, and does not reinforce male power at the expense of women.

A more fruitful approach to the issues facing men, and to eliminating violence against women, comes from understanding the construction of masculinity and how this not only leads to gender-based violence, it also provides the foundation for many of the issues faced by men in these difficult times. Linden Lewis, who warned of the danger of reinforcing men’s “rightful place” in the family and society, has also contributed to our understanding of how the understanding and practice of masculinity needs to change throughout the Caribbean. He defines masculinity as the range of behaviours and practices through which men learn to identify in a system of gender relations and in the context of the wider society. He continues…

Masculinity is the cultural expression of men’s understanding of themselves and their relations to women. Unmistakably, masculinity has much to do with the way men relate to other men – how they seek approval, recognition, respect and honour from each other. In short, masculinity refers to how men come to understand themselves as gendered subjects.29

Traditionally, masculinity has been based on the idea of the male breadwinner, male authority in the home, male independence and female dependence, and the control of men over public life. Furthermore, violence against women has been one method through which some men exerted the power and authority that comes with this view of masculinity. However, as Lewis has

28 Linden Lewis, Unsettling Masculinity in the Caribbean: Facing a Future Without Guarantees, p 24
29 Linden Lewis, Envisioning a Politics of Change within Caribbean Gender Relations, p 515
pointed out, gender relations, like other social relations, are dynamic – they can and do change over time. The reality of life in the Caribbean is already demonstrating a shift in these relations. The challenge is to re-define masculinity in context of these changes and to develop a vision of a society based on mutual respect and gender equality.

This understanding has specific implications for the response to violence against women, as well as efforts to end this violence. Counseling and intervention programmes for batterers and other perpetrators of violence must be built on the understanding that this is more than an “anger management” issue. These men must also be challenged to understand why they believe that exerting power and control over women is legitimate. In addition, strategies to end violence and abuse of women and girls at the broader societal level cannot be based on reinforcing traditional notions of masculinity.

One approach that has shown some success is that of the Association of Men Against Violence in Nicaragua. In a speech describing the development of the Association, Patrick Walsh describes some of the significant criteria contributing to the success of their work. First, men take responsibility for working to change the attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence against women. In doing this, the Association maintains close contact with Puntos de Encuentro, a feminist organization working in the area of violence against women. This establishes a system of accountability between men working with men, and women who are directly affected by men’s violent behaviours. In the process of developing their work, men in the Association went through a process of self-reflection and analysis to recognize their own connection to a definition of masculinity that breeds violence.

The Association’s mission clearly articulates the recognition that preventing and reducing violence against women must be based on “the establishment of new ways of relating between men and women based on gender justice and equity, promoting processes of change in the patriarchal visions, attitudes, values and behaviour of men.”

Based on this mission, the Association developed a “Community Intervention Strategy” – an integrated approach to working with men that encompasses training for men, awareness raising at a community level, the organization of groups and networks of men against violence at a local and national level and the active engagement of men in advocacy and lobbying at a local and national level. Central to this work is “unlearning machismo” and the challenging of traditional notions of masculinity as central to the goal of stopping men’s violent behaviour.

Challenging traditional ideas of masculinity will not be an easy task. In the long run, however, the success of efforts to end violence against women depends on understanding the roots of violent behaviour in these traditional ideas and on developing a new masculinity in our societies.

3. The Belizean Framework

As in other parts of the Caribbean, attention began to be paid to the issue of violence against women in the 1980s and led to a number of legislative and policy initiatives in the 1990s as well as greater public awareness and community-based response. These actions addressing violence against women were motivated by two main factors: the increased international focus on violence against women through instruments such as CEDAW and Belem Do Para, and the

---

30 Welsh, Patrick, *Changing Masculinities in Nicaragua: A Community Based Approach* p 6
role of Belizean women’s organizations in highlighting the problem in Belize and in advocating for legal and policy change that would meet the needs of women victimized by violence.

State response to violence against women is guided by international commitments that legally or morally require Belize to take action; policy documents that set forth the government’s plans for action on this and related issues; and Belizean law, including amendments over the past decade.

3.1. International Commitments

3.1.1. CEDAW


Although the original CEDAW document does not explicitly address gender-based violence against women, subsequent actions by the Committee have established that addressing this issue is indeed central to achieving the goals of the Convention. The most significant of these is General Recommendation 19, adopted by the Committee in 1992. This recommendation established that the definition of discrimination against women included in Article 1 of the Convention includes gender-based violence, that is...

...violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.31

The recommendation goes on to note that gender-based violence may breach specific provisions of the Convention, whether or not those provisions expressly mention violence. It outlines specific examples of how violence is implicitly included in various articles of the convention, as well as directing state parties to include a review of gender-based violence and measures taken to overcome it in all CEDAW reports.

Unlike some other international declarations, the Convention is intended to legally bind state parties to take action to implement the Convention. To this end, the Convention requires state parties to submit reports on the measures they have taken to implement the Convention at least every four years, or at the request of the CEDAW Committee. Following the submission of each report, the Committee provides follow-up questions to the country’s representative to the process. The representative then meets with the Committee to respond to these and any other questions they may wish to address. Based on this process, the Committee then prepares Concluding Comments which outline the positive aspects, areas of concern, and recommendations to strengthen compliance with the Convention. To date, Belize has submitted 2 reports – a combined first and second periodic report in 1999 and a combined third and fourth periodic report in 2007.

31 CEDAW General Recommendation Number 19 (11th Session, 1992)
In its combined third and fourth periodic report, Belize outlined a number of legislative and other initiatives in the area of violence against women. The report acknowledged, however, that the lack of capacity of both government bodies and women’s organizations has led to a lack of monitoring and evaluation of the impact of legislative and policy change.

In its Concluding Comments, the Committee commended Belize in several areas, including the passage of the Domestic Violence Act (2007) as well as amendments to the Evidence Act to protect the rights of rape victims at trial. However, the Committee also raised a number of concerns and made recommendations for action on gender-based violence. The committee expressed concern about the continued prevalence of violence against women and the lack of social awareness about it in the country, as well as the lack of progress make in preventing and eliminating violence against women, reflected in a lack of prosecutions and a lack of justice for women, particularly in rural areas. Specifically, the Committee recommended…

- the implementation of a comprehensive approach to addressing all forms of violence against women.
- effective enforcement and monitoring of the Domestic Violence Act.
- media and educational programmes to raise public awareness that all forms of violence against women are unacceptable and punishable by law.
- training on the new Domestic Violence Act, as well as sensitization on all forms of violence against women, for the judiciary, law enforcement officials, legal professionals, social workers and health care providers.
- an increase in the number of female judges and law enforcement officials as a means to encourage women to report cases of violence.
- the establishment of support measures for victims of domestic violence, including increasing the number of shelters and legal, medical and psychological support.
- a centralized system to gather data on violence against women.

In addition to specific recommendations on violence against women, the committee also made a number of general recommendations that are relevant to this area. The committee raised concerns about the lack of sex-disaggregated data to document progress on the status of women, the lack of access to justice for women, and the weak institutional capacity of the national machinery for the advancement of women (the Women’s Department). The committee recommended…

- a comprehensive system of data collection in all areas covered by the Convention to allow for an assessment of the actual situation of women and track trends over time.
- the elimination of impediments women may face in access to justice and the enhancement of women’s legal literacy, awareness of their rights and capacity to effectively claim them.
- priority be given to the strengthening of the national machinery for the advancement of women, including providing it with the authority, decision-making power and

---

32 A detailed description of recent legislative and policy initiatives is provided in Section 3.3.
human and financial resources necessary to work effectively for the promotion of women’s equality.

These broader recommendations are also crucial to effective actions to address violence against women.

Belize’s combined fifth and sixth periodic reports are scheduled to be presented in 2011.

### 3.1.2. Convention of Belem Do Para

The *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women* was passed by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in 1994. It is better known as the *Convention of Belem Do Para*, after the Brazilian city in which the document was passed. Belize ratified the convention in 1996.

The Convention asserts that violence against women is a violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms, based on the historically unequal power relations between women and men. It defines violence against women as *any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or private sphere, including…*

…physical, sexual and psychological violence:

a. *that occurs within the family or domestic unit or within any other interpersonal relationship, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the woman, including, among others, rape, battery and sexual abuse;*

b. *that occurs in the community and is perpetrated by any person, including, among others, rape, sexual abuse, torture, trafficking in persons, forced prostitution, kidnapping and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as in educational institutions, health facilities or any other place; and*

c. *that is perpetrated or condoned by the state or its agents regardless of where it occurs.*

The Convention goes on to outline the duties of states in implementing the Convention. Theses duties include, among others, the provision of specialized direct services to victims of violence against women; education and training of those involved in the administration of justice; promotion of public awareness and support for research and the gathering of statistics on violence against women. Significantly, the duties also include the responsibility of states to change the societal context in which violence against women occurs, specifically…

…to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, including the development of formal and informal educational programs appropriate to every level of the educational process, to counteract prejudices, customs and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on the

---

33 *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women: Convention of Belem Do Para, Chapter 1, Article 2*
By including this provision in the list of state duties, the Convention situates violence against women within a system of gender inequality and the subordination of women. This means that actions to end violence against women must include challenging many traditional ideas about the rightful place of women and men.

Like CEDAW, the Convention of Belem Do Para is intended to be binding on signatory states. A number of mechanisms are included in the Convention to hold states accountable to the Convention. Each state provides annual reports outlining measures adopted to prevent and prohibit violence against women, and to assist women affected by violence. States may request advisory opinions from the Inter-American Court on Human Rights on the interpretation of the Convention. Finally, any individual or group can lodge a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights if they believe that the state is violating Article 7 of the Convention, which outlines the obligations of states in implementing the Convention.

Belize’s 2008 report to the OAS on the Convention reflects many of the same concerns identified by the CEDAW committee. The report notes that significant steps have been made in the area of legislative action, including the passage of a new Domestic Violence Act in 2007 and the existence of specific legislation dealing with sexual harassment and trafficking in persons. It also records the existence of the crime of marital rape, which allows for the prosecution of rape within marriage under certain specified conditions. However, the report documents persistent, ongoing gaps between policy and legislation, effective implementation and impact.

In a number of cases, the report refers to “designed but non-implemented programmes”, for example, the National Plan of Action on Gender Based Violence, as well as specific programmes in the health and legal sectors. It would appear that a lack of government commitment in terms of the resources necessary to effectively implement legislation and policy, as well as a lack of political will and commitment to mainstream actions throughout the appropriate systems are significant factors in implementation failure.

Another area highlighted by the report is the limited research and data available to document the experience of violence against women as well as the effectiveness of laws, policies and programmes in this area. Although some advances have been made through the more systematic recording of reported cases through the Ministry of Health and the police, there continues to be little research and analysis on the realities women face.

The reporting mechanism specifically asks for information on an important, but often overlooked indicator – the existence of administrative and/or criminal sanctions against government officials who fail to enforce the regulations regarding violence against women. In the case of Belize, no such sanctions exist. For example, the new Domestic Violence Act states that “A Police Officer shall respond to every complaint or report alleging domestic violence whether or not the person making the complaint or the report is the victim.” However, there are no sanctions or consequences if this directive is not carried out. In the absence of sanctions, women who do not receive an effective response from the law enforcement, judicial, health care or social service systems are left with virtually no recourse.

34 Ibid. Chapter III, Article 8
35 Domestic Violence Act (2007), Section 24 (1)
3.1.3. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China in 1995. From the Conference, participating governments, including Belize, issued the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In the Declaration, states pledged their commitment to recognizing women’s rights as human rights, and to work to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The Platform for Action outlined more detailed strategic objectives and actions in 12 areas, including Violence Against Women.

As in the Convention of Belem Do Para, the Beijing Declaration situates violence against women within a system of gender inequality and women’s subordination – it is not a perversion of our system of social relations, but the logical extension of it. The Declaration states:

*Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement. Violence against women throughout the life cycle derives essentially from cultural patterns, in particular the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices and all acts of extremism linked to race, sex, language or religion that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community and society.*

The Platform for Action gives details of the actions to be taken by states to implement three Strategic Objectives:

- Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women.
- Study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures.
- Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action does not have a mechanism for regular reporting and oversight such as those implemented under CEDAW or Belem Do Para. However, a review of actions taken by states was done in preparation for the Ten Year Review of Beijing in 2005. Questionnaires were completed by states to outline their actions toward the implementation of the principles and strategies of the Declaration and Platform of Action.

The Belize report to this process outlines developments in the area of violence against women, in particular those addressing domestic violence, and focused on the positive steps taken rather than the difficulties and challenges that remain. However, in describing the main challenges to addressing all of the issues covered by Beijing, the report outlines some ongoing problems:

- Limited human and financial resources are a major challenge particularly when discussions about women’s issues are now being debated against the perception of men at risk or marginalized.

---

36 Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Platform for Action*, Section 118
• A major challenge continues to be the decrease in non-governmental agencies that focus particularly on gender and women’s issues.
• Limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms also pose a challenge and the availability of data disaggregated by sex and the analysis of such, are integral to this process.
• Traditional stereotypes, attitudes, expectations of society are perhaps the greatest challenges to overcome.

While the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action may not have the same binding authority as CEDAW and Belem Do Para, there is a strong ongoing moral responsibility by states to take action on the principles and strategies it sets forth.

3.1.4. The Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, the United Nations passed the *Millennium Declaration* to define key objectives in promoting the shared values of freedom, equality, equity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility in this new time period. Specifically, these objectives included the commitment…

*To combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.*

Based on these key objectives, states also endorsed eight *Millennium Development Goals*, including Goal 3: *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*. For each goal, one or more targets were established to measure progress toward these goals by 2015.

While violence against women is not explicitly included in these targets, it has a significant effect on the ability of states to achieve their goals. Most obviously, women’s equality and empowerment cannot be achieved while women are subject to systematic violence. This violence also impairs women’s ability to participate in economic activity and therefore affects the achievement of Goal 1: *End Poverty and Hunger*, and has clear implications for Goal 5: *Improve Maternal Health*.

In Belize, the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS situation makes the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 6: *Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases* a high priority. Taking strong action to reduce violence against women is essential to reaching these targets:

*Target 1: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.*

*Target 2: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it.*

Given that violence against women increases the risk of infection and that violence may also impede access to essential AIDS services, any strategy to combat the spread of the epidemic must have reducing violence against women as a key component.

---

37 *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, Section V 25
3.1.5. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality

*The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015* was adopted by the Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women’s/Gender Affairs in 2004. The Plan of Action sets forth 4 critical areas that provide a focus for the Commonwealth’s work to advance gender equality. Violence against women is addressed specifically as part of area II: *Gender, Human Rights and Law.*

The Plan of Action recognizes gender based violence as “one of the most intransigent forms of human rights violations because of it’s complex and varied forms and contributing factors.” It asserts that freedom from violence will only take place in the context of increased social, political and economic freedoms and notes the connection of gender based violence to other issues such as poverty and HIV/AIDS.

The Plan encourages Commonwealth governments to …

> Adopt an integrated, zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence, including strengthening of the law, appropriate public education, adequate institutional and financial support to address the needs of victims and witnesses, and rehabilitation of perpetrators.\(^3\)

While the Plan of Action is not structured as a binding document, it sets forth a number of methods for reviewing implementation. It emphasizes the development of partnerships between the Commonwealth Secretariat and member countries, and offers the Secretariats support in the areas of knowledge, information and capacity building. It proposes the harmonization of reporting with CEDAW and Beijing processes as far as possible, to reduce the burden of reporting and to avoid duplication. Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministers will meet periodically to review the progress made and constraints encountered in the implementation of the Plan. The last meeting was held in 2007 in Kampala, Uganda; however, Belize was not represented. In addition, Belize is currently a member of the Commonwealth Plan of Action Gender Monitoring Group which held its first meeting in New York in early 2009. Due to financial constraints, Belize was unable to attend.

3.1.6. Other Commitments

Belize also relates to a number of other international plans and declarations of relevance to violence against women. The *CARICOM Regional Plan of Action* provides a framework for mainstreaming gender into CARICOM’s work. The Plan of Action does not address violence against women directly, as it focuses attention on three strategic areas: Education (with a focus on building human capital); Health (with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS); and Poverty and the Economy (with a focus on the gender implications of the CARICOM single market and

---

\(^3\) The Plan of Action also addressed violence against women in area I: *Gender, democracy, peace and conflict*, recognizing the vulnerability of women to rape, sexual assault and other violations in conflict and post-conflict situations. In addition, the Plan recognizes the role of violence against women in increasing women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in area IV: *Gender and HIV/AIDS.*

One approach which crosscuts all policy and programme options is addressing the inequalities of power in sexual relationships. Campaigns to address the abuse of power in sexual relations should begin from the need to challenge the very construction of masculinity and femininity at all levels. In the short term, this means that all campaigns should be guided by an analysis of gender relations so that they oppose, rather than reflect and buttress, stereotypical notions of sexual behaviours.40

This perspective clearly ties work on HIV/AIDS with efforts to end violence against women.

As a member of the United Nations, Belize has been a part of various U.N. declarations relating to violence against women, including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Plan of Action (1994) and the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001). A list of international conventions and declarations on violence against women and related issues is included in Annex 3.

3.2. Policy Documents

3.2.1. National Gender Policy (2002)

Belize’s first National Gender Policy was produced by the National Women’s Commission, a government appointed advisory body on women’s concerns. The Policy sets forth a framework for considering the implications of gender for Belize, as well as a review of the laws of Belize from a gender perspective. It then sets forth the National Gender Policy in six areas. Five of these are based on those priority policy areas that GOB and NGOs selected from the twelve themes identified in the Beijing Platform of Action. These are Health; Wealth and Income Generation; Violence-Producing Conditions41; Education and Training; and Power and Decision-Making. A sixth area set forth policy on issues relating to Coordination and Implementation.

In the section dealing with “Violence-Producing Conditions”, the Policy sets forth recommendations on a number of issues42:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Includes recommendations on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence framework</td>
<td>• promoting stronger community awareness in rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• an evaluation of procedures for receiving, handling and pursuing complaints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40 Framework for Mainstreaming Gender into Key CARICOM Programmes, p 19
41 It is unclear why the Policy document chose the heading Violence-Producing Conditions to incorporate issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual abuse, since the recommendations themselves do not only address the conditions that lead to violence, but the violence itself.
42 The Policy also addressed issues of Child Abandonment and Neglect which apply equally to girls and boys.
Domestic violence and child abuse registration system
- the adoption of a registration system
- ongoing training of personnel in the system
- a review and assessment of the system
- the use of the information to inform the development of preventative strategies.

Sexual abuse provisions
- extending sexual abuse protection to boys
- reviewing regulations concerning parents who seek to withdraw complaints
- raising parental awareness of the consequences and effects of child abuse
- the criminalization of the use of “date-rape” drugs.

Access to justice
- more timely prosecution of sexual abuse and rape cases
- a review of access to legal assistance to victims of violence and abuse
- an examination of the merit of a national legal insurance system
- visually screening child victims of abuse from perpetrators when giving evidence
- a consideration of measures to allow child victims of violence or abuse to give testimony separate from the formal court hearing.

Victims and survivors of abuse
- a review of the need for counseling, monitoring and family rehabilitation services
- an assessment of the unmet demand for shelter accommodation
- an endeavor to ensure that alleged perpetrators – and not victims (whether adult or child) – are removed from the normal place of residence in domestic violence situations.

Perpetrators of abuse
- requiring the police investigation of the alleged victim’s withdrawal of a charge of domestic violence
- intervention, including counseling, for alleged perpetrators of abuse in instances where the victim seeks to withdraw charges
- education and counseling for those found guilty of violence or abuse, whether in or out of prison
- the examination of flexibility of parole provisions to allow for successful rehabilitative intervention
- aim to reduce the culture of violence by liaising with other English-speaking Caribbean states to prevent unacceptable or undesirable cable TV programming
Sexual harassment

- review the Sexual Harassment Act and take actions to improve its effectiveness
- develop and promote awareness of sexual harassment and its remedies through the Ministries of Labour, Education and Housing
- preparation of a model workplace sexual harassment policy by the Ministries of Labour and Education
- examining the merit of introducing regulations for mandatory reporting of sexual harassment

Commercial Sex Work

- more rigorous enforcement of provisions for trafficking in, employing or soliciting under-age workers.
- adoption and implementation of the National Screening Programme for Commercial Sex Workers
- review the Criminal Code and other legislation to treat male and female commercial sex workers and clients equally

Some achievements have been seen in the areas covered by the Policy in the time since it was passed. Through the Women’s Department, a considerable amount of public education has been carried out in the area of domestic violence, although there are still serious challenges in carrying this education into rural areas where many women may not have access to television, radio and print media, where there may be language barriers, and where some women lack literacy skills. The Ministry of Health Gender-Based Violence data system is in place, although it appears to be more successful in capturing domestic violence than sexual offenses not committed by intimate partners. The soon to be initiated Batterer’s Intervention Programme will be a step in efforts to address the behaviour of the perpetrators of abuse. Plans are underway at the Women’s Department to continue to review legislation in the area of Sexual Harassment and assess the need for legislative or policy change that would lead to more effective implementation.

Despite these advances, the potential of the National Gender Policy to lead change in this and other areas has not been realized. Specifically with respect to the recommendations on Violence-Producing Conditions, these limitations can be identified:

- The Policy focuses attention on the areas of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse of Children, but has less to say about sexual offenses against adult women, except to call for more timely prosecution of cases, and a general call for greater access to legal assistance for all victims.
- Many of the recommendations do not call for policy change, but rather to “ascertain”, “review” or “examine” various specific situations. Given that the task of doing this is

---

43 This lack of attention to rape and sexual assault is not restricted to the National Gender Policy. The Belize Situational Analysis of Gender and Development, which provided input to the National Policy, has no reference to rape and other forms of violence against women other than domestic violence. In the interviews and discussions that provided input to this review, most informants translated “violence against women” to mean “domestic violence”, indicating a lack of consciousness of the serious issue of sexual violence.
left to an under-resourced and under-staffed Women’s Department, it is unlikely that these calls for examination will lead to actual changes in policy and practice.

In addition to those limitations specific to recommendations on violence against women, there are some general challenges that curb the effectiveness of the Policy. First, the Policy does not set objectives or indicators for the various issue areas, making it impossible to monitor in terms of the effectiveness of the actions it promotes. Furthermore, there is no linking of policy to resources, or to timelines for action. It is not difficult for governments to endorse policy documents where there is no obligation to provide the resources to implement those proposals in a timely manner. The result is a National Gender Policy with some good directions, but few teeth.

In 2009, the National Women’s Commission is planning a major review and revision to the Policy. Participants at a consultation on the existing policy in March 2009 stressed the need to create a policy that is linked to indicators and resources, and that will be tied to a plan for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of results.


The National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence was produced for the National Gender-Based Violence Committee, composed of representatives of both public sector and civil society organizations with interest in or responsibility for responding to instances of gender based violence. It was intended to provide a strategy for “coordinated and cross-sectional integrated approach…to address the cultural, social and economic obstacles to leading lives free of violence.”

The Plan of Action sets out a series of actions to be taken with respect to a number of Strategic Goals and Objectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE: To reduce the number of gender-based violent crimes in Belize.</td>
<td>• Supply cultural and educational information to Belizeans to prevent gender-based violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE: To provide a comprehensive and supportive service to victims of gender-based violence in Belize.</td>
<td>• Ensure supportive environment in Belize for victims to move on with their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR: Rehabilitate perpetrators of gender-based violent crimes</td>
<td>• Reduce the number of re-offenders through rehabilitation of abusers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

44 National Plan of Action for Gender-Based Violence in Belize, p 5
While these goals and objectives may articulate a positive direction for work on gender-based violence, the objectives are very broad and difficult to monitor because they do not specify exactly what the Plan is intended to accomplish. Furthermore, the actions recommended in each section are very wide-ranging, often vague and unrealistic in the time frame given. Finally, the lack of commitment at various levels limited the degree to which participants in the committee took up the responsibilities as outlined in the plan. Even in those cases where individual government departments were committed, lack support from the Ministry and Cabinet undermined their ability to take action.

In addition to these general shortcomings in the Plan of Action and its implementation, there are some specific concerns about individual actions recommended in the Plan. In a number of cases, the Plan proposes actions without specifying how these actions will specifically address issues of gender-based violence. For example, the Plan calls for a “Mentoring Programme” and “Parenting Skills Workshops” without reference to the target groups and content of these programmes will contribute to the overall strategy.

One recommendation that should be highlighted for particular concern is that support groups for men should be set up in each district. In theory, this is a laudable action, but the Plan does not provide a statement of the principles that should be the foundation of these groups. An understanding of violence against women within a system of gender inequality and women’s subordination is essential to reducing and eliminating violence against women. Given that experience elsewhere, as well as in Belize, has shown that men’s groups sometimes operate from a very different perspective and reinforce rather than challenge traditional power relationships, this is a serious oversight.

The current National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence has had only very limited success in achieving its objectives. Even those recommended actions that are being implemented – such as the Battering Intervention Programme to be launched in 2009 – are more the result of the dedication of the Women’s Department than any ongoing commitment to coordinated action through the Gender-Based Violence Committee.

Plans are underway through the Women’s Department to develop a new Plan of Action that is specific, realistic and tied to the resources needed for effective implementation. A major challenge will be to achieve a commitment to the plan at the highest level and developing effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms throughout the system.


Like many other countries, Belize has experienced the feminization of HIV/AIDS in Belize. The ratio of male to female infection narrowed over the years, and now stands at almost 1:1. For young women between 15 and 24, the rate of infection is consistently higher than for young men. Any strategy to halt and reverse the spread of the epidemic must address the issue of violence against women.

The National HIV/AIDS Policy specifically addresses Gender Equality and Equity as one of its guiding principles:

---

45 Ministry of Health/PAHO, The HIV Epidemic in Belize: Toward a Gender-Based Response, in process
The gender dimensions of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are now widely recognized. Equal gender relations and the empowerment of women and their partners are critical elements of an effective HIV/AIDS response.46

Furthermore, the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan notes that the ability (or lack of ability) of women to negotiate safer sexual practices can be a significant factor in their vulnerability to infection47.

Unfortunately, neither the Policy nor the Strategic Plan specifically addresses the need to link action on violence against women to an overall strategy on HIV/AIDS, nor are victims of violence acknowledged to face particular barriers to accessing treatment and support. The strategic plan does recognize that young women are particularly at risk due to poverty, child abuse and early sexual initiation, often by older men. It also notes that migrant women are often vulnerable to “survival sex” and sexual assault. But it stops short of a more general recognition that women who are victims of violence are a particularly vulnerable group. As a result, the Plan does not contain specific strategies to break the link between violence against women and HIV/AIDS.

3.2.4. Other Policy Documents

There are a number of other Policy documents that have direct or indirect relevance to the process of taking action on violence against women.

The National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (2002) includes the following commitments:

- Amend, enact and strictly enforce legislation and take preventive measures to protect children, women, youth and elderly from all forms of violence and sexual abuse, including rape.
- Develop safe, age-appropriate and confidential programmes for medical, social, psychological rehabilitation and support for girls and boys who are subjected to violence and sexual abuse, including rape.48

This Policy sets forth broad outlines for action, without specifying specific actions or objectives. Although it commits the government to provide resources for the implementation of the policy, no specific resources are attached to the implementation of its commitments, including those above.

The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2004 – 2015) was a significant step forward in the development of national plans in Belize, as it included specific outcomes and targets. In addition, it was signed by both the then-Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, to promote ownership of the document as a truly national plan. The National Plan of Action includes in its overall principles,

46 National AIDS Commission, National Policy on HIV/AIDS, p 12
48 Ministry of Health, Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy 2002, p 11
Due care for, and attention to, the principles of gender equality.49

The Plan includes Child Protection as one of 6 areas of concern. The Plan sets targets and outlines strategies to address family violence and child abuse which will undoubtedly have a positive effect on both girls and boys. However, it does not address the particular vulnerability of girl children to sexual abuse, both within and outside the home.

3.3. Law and Legislative Reform

3.3.1. Violence by Intimate Partners

The new Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2007 and came into force in 2008. It replaced the previous Domestic Violence Act (1992). The new law provides for sanctions against physical, emotional or psychological, sexual and financial abuse. In Belize City, it comes under the jurisdiction of the Family Court. In the districts where there are no family courts, it comes under the jurisdiction of the district Magistrate’s Court.

The new Act strengthened the courts’ ability to provide protection for women being abused by intimate partners. One of the significant changes included in the legislation is the broadening of the definition of “spouse” to include not only individuals who are living together but unmarried, but also those who have children in common or who are in visiting relationships (de facto spouse). The Act allows for a number of orders designed to provide protection from domestic violence, including abuse by intimate partners:

- A Protection Order which prohibits the respondent from abusing the applicant, from being on premises named in the order (such as a residence, place of employment or school), from communicating with the applicant, from taking or damaging property belonging to the applicant, from approaching the applicant within a specified distance, or from encouraging another person to engage in any of this conduct.

- An Occupation Order which grants the applicant the right to live in the household residence.

- A Tenancy Order which grants the applicant the right to live in rented household premises, and directs the respondent to continue to paying the rent on those premises during the period of the order.

50 The Act is stated in gender-neutral terms – that is, it provides equal protection for both women and men who are victims of domestic abuse. However, in this report, attention is focused on the implications for women who are abused by intimate partners.
51 One remaining limitation of the definitions of “spouse” and “de facto spouse” is they must be a person of the opposite sex, leaving women and men in same-sex couples outside the protection of the law.
In addition to issuing these Orders, the court may also order an abuser to return property, pay financial compensation\(^{52}\), pay child maintenance (until a permanent arrangement can be put into place), seek therapy or counseling, and turn any weapons used in the commission of domestic violence in to the police.

When an application is made for a Protection Order, the Court may make an Interim Order until the hearing takes place. Interim Orders may be granted whether or not the abuser is present or has been given notice of the proceedings. When an Interim Order is made, the court will summons the respondent to appear at a further hearing as soon as possible.

The Act also provides for stiff penalties for breach of court orders in domestic violence cases. These include:

- For a first conviction, a fine up to $9,000, or imprisonment up to one year, or both.
- For a second conviction, a fine of between $12,000 and $15,000, or imprisonment of up to 24 months, or both.
- For any subsequent conviction, imprisonment of five years.

For first-time offenders, the Act allows for a Rehabilitation Order in place of punishment. Such orders require the offender to undergo probation in a rehabilitation programme and to engage in community service work for one year.

Although the new Domestic Violence Act addresses many of the deficiencies and flaws of the previous Act, there continue to be concerns about its implementation. The Chief Magistrate has said that the legislation is powerful, but the lack of legal services for women undermines their ability to use the legislation to its full potential.\(^{53}\)

One particular weakness of the new law is the absence of consequences for police officers who fail to fulfill their responsibilities under the Act. The Act states that “every police officer shall respond to every complaint or report alleging domestic violence whether or not the person making the complaint or the report is the victim.”\(^{54}\) However, there are no sanctions for police officers who do not respond. Given that lack of police response is an ongoing concern in domestic violence cases, this is a problem.

The Domestic Violence Act is a civil remedy, with the criminal process only coming into play if an abuser breaches an order of the court. Criminal Code provisions on assault, harm and other violent offences can also be used in cases of domestic violence. These charges are currently heard in Magistrate’s Court (or in the Supreme Court, depending on the severity of the offense). Participants in the systems focus group suggested that criminal charges stemming from domestic violence and currently heard as criminal matters in Magistrate’s Court should be heard at the same time as any other applications the woman may make for court orders, maintenance, etc. This would mean broadening the authority of the Family Court to deal with these matters.

---

\(^{52}\) Financial compensation may be ordered for loss of earnings, dental or medical expenses, the cost of moving, accommodation expenses, and any reasonable legal costs of applying for the order.

\(^{53}\) Chief Magistrate Margaret McKenzie, WIN-Belize Workshop on the New Domestic Violence Act, March 28, 2009

\(^{54}\) *Domestic Violence Act, 2007 Section 24 (1)*
In the absence of Family Courts in the districts, criminal charges should be heard by the district Magistrates at the same time as other matters relating to the abuse.

3.3.2. Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls

Sexual offenses are included in the Criminal Code, including the offenses of rape, marital rape, aggravated assault (which includes indecent assault), carnal knowledge, incest and unnatural crime.

Rape and marital rape are indictable offenses, punishable by imprisonment from eight years to life. Rape is defined as “the carnal knowledge of a female of any age without her consent”\textsuperscript{55} As such, the crime of rape requires some degree of penetration of the vagina by the penis. Other sexual assaults must be prosecuted as aggravated assault/indecent assault, with a maximum sentence of three years.\textsuperscript{56}

A number of amendments relating to rape and sexual offenses have occurred in recent years. The Evidence Act, Chapter 95 was amended to protect the rights of rape victims during testimony at trial. Specifically, evidence or questions concerning the past sexual history of the complainant with a person other than the alleged offender cannot be introduced except with leave of the judge. In addition, the requirement that the Judge should warn the jury of the need for caution before acting on the uncorroborated testimony of the victim was withdrawn.

In 1999, Criminal Code was amended to include the offense of marital rape. This offense allows a woman to bring a charge of marital rape against her husband under certain specific circumstances. A man commits marital rape if he has sexual intercourse with his wife without her consent, and knowing she does not consent or recklessly not caring whether she consents or not. However, this charge can only be laid under specified circumstances:

- The spouses have separated and are living apart.
- There is a written separation agreement between the two spouses.
- The spouses have begun divorce proceedings.
- A court order has been issued to keep the spouses apart.
- The husband has committed an act of assault and battery, harm or injury either just before or at the same time as the sexual intercourse.

This law essentially continues to prevent a woman who is living with her husband from charging her husband with rape unless he uses other violence during the rape. Ironically, women are put in the position of submitting to forced sex (and therefore eliminating the possibility of bringing a rape charge), or resisting to the point of serious injury.

A different approach to this issue would have been to remove any spousal exemption from the general rape provision, without putting conditions on the situations in which women could bring a charge of rape against their husbands. One informant for this review, who had been involved

\textsuperscript{55} Belize Criminal Code, Section 71 (1)

\textsuperscript{56} Sexual offenses also include Incest (Sections 62-63) and Unnatural Crime, defined as “carnal knowledge against the order of nature with any person or animal” (Section 53).
in developing the marital rape provision, commented that the reason for pursuing the marital rape provision (instead of including married women in the existing rape offense) was “to get something on the books”. Women’s advocates at the time believed that the men in the Cabinet continued to believe that women should not be denying sex to their husbands, and therefore would not support a rape provision that did not include the conditions outlined above.

There are a number of areas where existing provisions for rape and sexual assault need attention. First, married women should have the right to charge their husbands with rape without the conditions included in the existing law. The offense of rape itself is limited, requiring penis-vagina penetration and excluding many equally violent and degrading acts such as penetration with other objects and penetration of the mouth or anus. The difference in sentencing between rape (eight years to life) and indecent assault (maximum three years) does not reflect the different forms of sexual violence, many of which can be as serious as actual rape. The section of the criminal code dealing with rape and sexual assault is long overdue for substantive change.

The Criminal Code also includes provisions intended to provide protection for young women and girls. In 1999, the law was amended to increase the penalties for these offenses. Carnal knowledge of a female child under the age of 14 carries a penalty of 12 years to life imprisonment, while carnal knowledge of a girl over 14 but less than 16 years of age carries a penalty of five to ten years. Since 1999, reporting of child abuse, including sexual abuse, is mandatory.

However, contradictions with other laws continue to allow for the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls. The legal age for marriage with parental consent is 14 years. This means that an older man who has sex with a girl under 16 can escape prosecution for carnal knowledge if he obtains parental consent to marry the girl. This contradiction could be addressed by increasing the minimum age for marriage to be consistent with the Criminal Code offenses.

In addition to Criminal Code provisions for sexual offenses, Belize also passed the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act in 1996. Given that no other country in the Caribbean had specific legislation dealing with sexual harassment at that point, this was indeed a forward looking move. The legislation defines sexual harassment in employment as “an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours…or other unwelcome sexual conduct” that leads to an employment disadvantage, interferes unreasonably with the person’s work, or creates a hostile or intimidating work environment. The Act also prohibits sexual harassment in schools and other institutions, and in accommodations.

Despite its good intentions, no cases have been brought forward under the Act since it was passed, despite popular opinion that the practice is widespread. No systematic analysis has been done on the reasons why women have not come forward. In some cases, there may be a lack of information about the protections included in the legislation. Some women express a resigned acceptance of sexual harassment as “just the way things are”. In addition, weak labour protection in other areas may make some women afraid of losing their jobs, even though

57 One rationale for maintaining this young age is that cultural practices in Maya villages encourage marriage at an early age. However, women in the community consultations in two Maya villages said that marrying young increased a woman’s risk of being the victim of domestic violence. The vast majority supported increasing the legal age for marriage to at least 16.

58 Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act, Section 3 (4)
the Sexual Harassment Act includes sanctions against “victimization” of those making complaints under the Act.

The Women’s Department is planning a review of the Act to determine what, if any, legislative changes are needed, as well as to identify other strategies to promote more effective use of protection against sexual harassment.

4. Violence Against Women in Belize

In Belize, as elsewhere in the Caribbean and around the globe, violence against women is a serious concern. Although no study has been done to estimate the extent of this violence, the experience of those working in the public sector and civil society teaches that violence against women is widespread. Survivors of violence and other women in the community know that they continue to be potential targets.

In recent years, some attempts have been made to gather data on reported gender-based violence. Of course, the number of reported incidents does not demonstrate the actual occurrence, given that victims of domestic and sexual violence often do not report to the police or other agencies. Nevertheless, the increased availability of information on reported cases provides much needed input for those working to develop better responses to women who experience violence.

One such initiative is the Ministry of Health’s Surveillance System on Gender-Based Violence. The system was initiated by the Ministry in 2000 in cooperation with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Data is gathered through the National Gender-Based Violence Registration Form, which is completed by the Police, the Women’s Department, hospitals, Haven House Shelter for Battered Women, Family Court and Magistrate’s Court in the districts. Although envisioned as a method to track gender-based violence as a whole, the Ministry concedes that, at this point, it mainly captures domestic violence.

Tables 1 and 2 provide information on the number of domestic violence and sexual abuse incidents reported to the Ministry of Health from 2006 to 2008. As noted above, almost all the sexual abuse reports were by intimate partners, or, in the case of young victims, family members. In a small number of cases, complainants were family friends or other close to the domestic situation.
The Ministry of Health statistics provide a good deal of information on the circumstances of the violence, and characteristics of both victim and aggressor. These statistics demonstrate that domestic violence occurs in all of Belize’s ethnic groups, and at all educational levels.

PAHO is continuing to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Health to improve the surveillance system. One area that should be addressed is the need to capture sexual violence committed by those other than intimate partners or family members in the system.

The Belize Police Department has also initiated a system of **Gender-Based Violence Statistics Nationwide**. Unlike the Ministry of Health system, the police method records both domestic violence and sexual offenses. Thirty-nine categories of abuse are recorded, most of reflect specific criminal code charges, but also include breaches of court orders and categories of verbal, physical, sexual and economic abuse as well as custodial disputes and uncontrollable behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Rape and Attempted Rape</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corozal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Walk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stann Creek</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Belize Police Department, Gender-Based Violence Statistics Nationwide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Carnal Knowledge*</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corozal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Walk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stann Creek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes Carnal Knowledge, Unlawful Carnal Knowledge and, in 2008, Attempted Carnal Knowledge

**Source:** Belize Police Department, Gender-Based Violence Statistics Nationwide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Sexual Offenses**</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corozal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Walk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stann Creek</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Includes Rape, Attempted Rape, Unlawful Carnal Knowledge, Carnal Knowledge, Attempted Carnal Knowledge (2008), Indecent Assault, Unnatural Crime (2007-8) and Incest.

**Source:** Belize Police Department, Gender-Based Violence Statistics Nationwide

Because of the varied categories used in the statistics, it is perhaps most appropriate to use them to focus on particular areas of gender-based violence. Tables 3, 4 and 5 provide the statistics given for rape and attempted rape, carnal knowledge, and sexual offenses as a whole.

The statistics appear to reveal some ongoing problems with the collection of data. For example, according to the statistics, in 2006 three districts (Corozal, Orange Walk and Toledo) reported no cases of rape, carnal knowledge or other sexual offenses. This is quite unlikely.
In addition, the 2008 statistics gave separate totals by station for some districts\(^{59}\) – for example, Cayo statistics were listed separately for Belmopan, San Ignacio and Benque Viejo. The 2008 statistics for Cayo reflect only reports from Belmopan, as no cases are recorded for San Ignacio or Benque. This also indicates that there are ongoing problems in the collection of data for the Police Department’s Gender-Based Violence Statistics.

Although there are some continuing problems with data collection systems in Belize, it has been a step forward to have at least some record of the incidence of reported gender-based violence in Belize. Attention needs to be paid to how to improve these systems to more accurately reflect the number of women who are coming forward. In addition, given that many, if not most, women who are victims of violence do not report to the police or other agencies, research is needed to develop a more complete picture of the incidence of violence against women in Belize.

4.1. Common Themes

In the focus groups, interviews and community consultations that provided input into this review, many common issues and concerns were identified. Some of these relate to the response of specific systems to victims of violence, and will be discussed in the following section. But many of the recurring issues reflect general concerns about the approach needed to effectively work against violence against women.

One common theme throughout this review was the recognition of **the need to understand the roots of violence against women** as a critical part of developing an effective response. As discussed previously, the foundation for this violence is a system based on gender inequality and women’s subordination. Both the women’s advocate and survivors’ focus groups identified violence as a tool with which some men maintain power and control over women. The idea that men should “be the boss and keep women in their place” continues to be a part of our culture. The trivialization of sexual harassment and sexual assault, powerful men preying on young girls, and the silencing of women who try to change these conditions are all symptoms of this. Focus group participants as well as interview informants agreed that we have too little understanding of how violence against women is both the result of unequal power and a critical tool in maintaining it.

Doing more analysis and education on the links between violence, power and women’s subordination is not just an academic exercise. If we do not understand why this violence occurs, we cannot develop effective responses to it – to support survivors and to change men’s violent behaviour. When women are kept in a subordinate position, it limits their ability to access care and support. Furthermore, efforts to reduce and eventually eliminate violence against women will be unsuccessful if we do not address the social and cultural foundation that sustains it.

Another recurring theme is **the trivialization of sexual violence, especially against adult women and older girls**. Little attention has been paid to sexual violence in recent years, even by women’s advocates. While public consciousness of domestic violence has increased significantly, there has been less discussion of sexual violence, except when it involves children.

\(^{59}\) These were consolidated for the purpose of the tables provided here.
For many, discussions of violence against women or gender-based violence automatically turn into talk about domestic violence, reflecting a lack of consciousness or comfort in addressing rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

One reason for this silence is the cultural acceptance that sexual violence is “no big deal” and “just some sex”. If, as one focus group participant said, “women are for sex”, then it’s not a serious issue if they are used for that purpose. Media reports often imply that women and older girls are raped or sexually abused because of something they did – they were in the wrong place or did the wrong thing. Women who try to challenge these ideas are often ridiculed. One informant reported that in the mid-1990s, after hearing a public service announcement to raise awareness about rape, one popular radio host attacked the announcement as being “totally out of line”. Given that attempts to talk about rape and sexual abuse are generally met with either hostility or laughter from men, women are silenced. Women in the community consultation on sexual violence were well aware of its extent and effects, but also knew that it is difficult to have the issue taken seriously. As a result, women do not report. When cases do go to trial, juries may also blame the victim and refuse to hold men accountable for their violent and abusive sexual behaviour. Many informants agreed that it is essential to challenge the acceptance of sexual violence in our culture.

In all forms of violence against women, rural women are even more vulnerable. They are physically isolated from services and support. Traditional ideas about the roles of men and women tend to be particularly strong in rural communities. Many women do not have access to television and radio that are key methods of raising consciousness about the issue. In a multi-cultural society such as Belize, language barriers may also contribute to women’s isolation. This is particularly true for women in Maya communities. Programmes that work for women’s empowerment in these communities are essential. One member of the Toledo Maya Women’s Council said, “not being educated is like walking in the dark. Getting educated is like walking in the light. Now I’m walking in the light.” This woman reported being a victim of domestic violence in the past, but as she became more empowered through her involvement in TMWC, the violence stopped.

A problem raised by almost all informants is the lack of resources to address violence against women. For the most part, government has not backed up its statements condemning this violence with the human and financial resources for a truly effective response. Often, both NGOs and the Women’s Department try to fill the gaps through short term support from external sources. While these projects can make a contribution, they are no replacement for government’s responsibility to provide the staff and other resources necessary on an ongoing basis.

Belize needs to develop stronger mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation for legislation, policies and programmes on violence against women. It is extremely important to measure the impact of actions on this issue. Both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used to ensure that responses are effectively implemented and that they are having the intended results.

---

60 This is, of course, not the only area where monitoring and evaluation needs to be strengthened. A number of national and international agencies have recognized Belize’s weak culture of monitoring and evaluation as a barrier to identifying the most effective strategies on a range of issues.
4.2. Systems Response

Women experiencing violence have many needs – for safety and security, access to justice, health services, emotional and psychological support, and practical needs like shelter, food and transportation. The ability of various systems to respond to those needs is critical. When these systems fail, women who are battered and abused by intimate partners can be trapped in violent situations; victims of sexual violence may suffer avoidable long term physical and emotional effects; and young women who are sexually abused realize that they are neither valued nor protected.

Before considering the challenges facing different systems in responding to violence against women, there is one issue that runs throughout the entire network of institutions concerned with this violence. Almost all of those providing input to this review talked about the lack of confidentiality in systems as being a major barrier to women coming forward. Sometimes this lack of confidentiality stems from physical lack of privacy in the buildings where these systems are housed. However, an even more serious concern is that women in the survivors focus group and community consultations believe that they cannot trust workers in the systems to maintain confidentiality. They believe that too many of those working in the systems who are supposed to support women often feel little obligation to maintain their privacy and dignity. This problem is not exclusive to situations of violence, but the implications in these situations are more serious than most.

Of course, this is not an indictment of every person working in these systems. However, breaches of confidentiality appear to be too frequent, even when confidentiality policies are in place. There is an urgent need to address this issue by putting in place and enforcing strong sanctions for any public sector worker who breaches the confidentiality of victims of violence against women. If women cannot be assured of confidentiality in their dealings with the police, courts, health care institutions and social services, other actions to reform these systems will have limited effect.

4.2.1. The Police

Police response to victims of violence against women continues to be a major challenge. To be sure, there are some individual police officers who strive to take domestic violence and sexual offenses seriously and to treat the women with dignity and respect. However, women’s advocates, survivors of violence and workers in other systems continue to raise serious concerns about police response.

In theory, domestic violence cases in Belize are assigned to a Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) in each station. In practice, however, only Belize City has a fully functioning DVU. In other stations, individual officers – usually only one per station – are assigned to handle domestic violence cases. In one district town, an informant reported that this was “one woman officer picked at random” – usually untrained and unfamiliar with the Domestic Violence Act. On the weekend, the response is “she no here”.

One woman police officer working as the domestic violence officer at a village station said that the police system of assigning officers works against having trained, committed officers outside of Belize City. She said that, since police basic training in domestic violence is limited to
a few days of a 6 month training programme, most training in this area occurs after being assigned to work in this area. Officers assigned to domestic violence sometimes attend workshops and learn a good deal “on the job”. However, after a few years, officers are moved to another area of police work. As this officer said, “Once you finally get there, you get moved.” Participants in the systems focus group agreed that the police should develop a system of long-term specialist officers who work in the area of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. This would insure that valuable training and experience in responding to victims of violence is not lost. In addition, officers who show interest in making this their field of specialization are more likely to have the attitudes and commitment that lead to a good response.

In rural areas, **practical concerns such as lack of transportation** hamper an effective response. Policing of rural areas is accomplished though a police station in one village that serves many other villages miles apart. Shared vehicles are often unavailable to respond to complaints of violence. One police officer described taking the bus or hitchhiking to reach women in the villages. In situations of violence where a delayed response can put the victim at greater risk, this is unacceptable. This officer also said that victims must often be taken to health services on the bus, which adds to the stress that the victim already experiences and subjects her to gossip and speculation from onlookers. The officer noted that being in uniform was another problem, as those in small villages quickly speculate about why the woman is in need of a police officer. She suggested that officers dealing with violence against women should be in plain clothes to make the women more comfortable and protect her privacy in the village.

Informants to the review process noted that, as a male dominated institution, **police actions toward women who report violence are affected by traditional attitudes about women.** Furthermore, a significant number of police officers are themselves abusers, further undermining the possibility of a reliable response. There appears to be a lack of ownership and understanding of the urgency of developing a more positive police approach at the highest levels.

All of this has led to a situation where **women have little confidence that the police will take their reports of violence seriously** and take the appropriate action. Various reports reinforce this lack of confidence. Women report that, when police are called with a report of domestic abuse, they either do not arrive or they arrive late. Women who report to police stations are often met with an unsympathetic or even hostile response. There are also accounts of police requiring unofficial “fees” for serving court orders. It is widely believed that police officers who commit acts of violence against women are frequently not held accountable for their actions. Because there is no mechanism for external oversight, women in these situations are left without recourse.

The survivors focus group identified **fast, trained police response ensured by outside accountability** as one of the key changes necessary. Other informants echoed this, and stressed that the police can no longer be left to police themselves. External oversight is essential to provide redress in specific situations as well as to push the police to commit themselves these issues at the highest level.

One mechanism that has not been used to promote police accountability on violence against women is the **Office of the Ombudsman.** After the position was vacant for almost a year, the government appointed a new Ombudsman, in January, 2009. The Ombudsman has the
authority to investigate corruption or wrongdoing by any public authority, as well as any injustice, injury or abuse resulting from the action of a public authority. Police inaction or corrupt practices in instances of violence against women fall within this jurisdiction. Currently, most women are unaware that these problems can be reported to the Ombudsman’s Office. Public education is needed on the role of the office in this area. As part of the larger project of which this review is a part, a protocol will be established between the Office of the Ombudsman, the Women’s Department and the Police Department to strengthen the role of the Ombudsman in investigating complaints relating to violence against women.

Although the Ombudsman’s Office could provide one avenue for improving police response, the Office currently does not have sufficient resources to carry out even existing responsibilities. With only one investigator, plans to establish greater presence for the Ombudsman in the districts have already been delayed. The new Ombudsman seems committed to a more vigorous role for the Office; however, she will need a significant increase in resources to make this happen.

In addition, the current Ombudsman points out that promoting the use of the Ombudsman’s office does not rule out the need for a Civilian Review Board\(^{61}\) to investigate complaints of abuse of authority and corruption within the police department. Violence against women is not the only area in which public confidence in the police’s ability to discipline itself is low. A review board would provide the public with an independent avenue to lodge their complaints and would boost their trust that such complaints will be taken seriously. Such a board should have the authority to recommend police department action where it is demonstrated that misconduct has taken place. In the absence of a general Civilian Review Board, consideration should be given to establishing a special board to oversee police conduct in cases of gender-based violence. Any external board must also have the ability to examine police response to allegations of violence against women against its officers.

Another area of concern in policing is the inadequacy of evidence gathering, especially in cases of rape and sexual abuse. Prosecutors complain of case files being received up to a year after the incident occurred. Files are often missing key pieces. Police often do not interview key witnesses who could provide important evidence in the case. The Director of Public Prosecutions noted that the police do not treat sexual offenses as major crimes and do not assign the most experienced investigators to these cases. The development of a sexual offenses unit in the Criminal Investigations Branch (CIB) could be one way of addressing these concerns.

Many informants pointed to the need for increased police training in responding to violence against women. Despite past efforts, training needs to be expanded. In addition to increased attention on the law and procedures needed to effectively enforce it (such as evidence gathering), training should also address the causes of gender-based violence and lead officers to examine their own ideas that can have a negative impact on their treatment of victims.

However, training is often seen as an end in itself, rather that one component of a wider strategy to improve response. This strategy must include:

\(^{61}\) Civilian Review Boards are intended to bring transparency and public accountability to the process of responding to complaints. While an appropriate model for Belize needs further discussion, the boards generally include members of the public, often appointed by civil society organizations. A model might also include specific roles for public sector appointees with specific expertise to bring to the process.
• a clearer commitment from the highest levels of the Police Department and the Ministry;
• ongoing training, including for senior officers;
• on the job briefing sessions, to reinforce the procedures learned in training;
• a regular, systematic review of police response to violence against women, including the impact of training on that response;

Implicit in all of this is the recognition that violence against women is a major policing issue that requires focused and organized police attention at all levels.

There is one additional, and critical, issue relating to policing. A frequent complaint of police officers, prosecutors and other working in systems is that women either do not charge the perpetrators or later ask for charges to be withdrawn. There are many reasons why women do not wish to proceed. One key reason is fear of retaliation by the man involved. Other jurisdictions have implemented a mandatory arrest policy in which police must arrest and charge in situations where there are reasonable grounds to do so. This removes the onus from the woman to lay a charge. Consequently, the perpetrator cannot use pressure on her to have the charge dropped. It also establishes the principle that violence against women is not just a “private matter” but a serious breach of public standards to ensure the safety and security of all. It also creates a true “zero tolerance” approach to violence against women. As noted previously, this policy has been endorsed by participants in the regional conference on gender-based violence and the administration of justice, including strong participation from the Caribbean Association of Commissioners of Police. Participants in the systems focus group also believed that this would be a step forward.

4.2.2. The Courts

While some advances have taken place to improve the response of the court system to violence against women, challenges still persist. Women continue to believe that the courts often do not respond to their needs.

The new Domestic Violence Act considerably strengthens the courts’ ability to protect women. As we have already noted, however, the Chief Magistrate has said that women’s lack of access to legal services undermines their ability to use the legislation to its full potential. Participants in all three focus groups agreed that access to legal information, services and representation is critical in all cases of violence against women.

In the area of legal information, the Women’s Department has produced various materials, including a handbook outlining women’s rights under the law. However, more resources are necessary to disseminate this information more broadly, to translate it into more popular forms, and to reach women in rural areas.

Legal services for women are badly lacking. Legal Aid, only available in Belize City, does not routinely deal with Domestic Violence cases, and with only a single lawyer available, would be

62 Alexander Dresch, Women’s Rights Handbook
unable to provide representation to all the women who need it. A few lawyers offer pro bono representation for women in shelters, but there is no overall system in place to encourage or require members of the bar to provide pro bono services. The Belize National Gender Policy recognizes the need for access to legal representation, and raises the possibility of a national legal insurance scheme. Another possibility would be to put a special levy on lawyers’ fees which would support the expansion of legal aid services to all those who need it.

Just as traditional ideas about women affect police response to violence against women, so do these ideas shape women’s experience with the courts. For example, one informant told of a Magistrate who told a woman to “go outside under the tree and kiss up” with her abuser, without dealing with her application for a Protection Order. These attitudes persist despite strong positions taken by both the Chief Magistrate and the Director of the Family Court that women’s complaints must be taken seriously. These attitudes also affect women when testify against their attackers in sexual offense cases. One rape victim reported that the prosecutor was laughing along with others in the court during her testimony. There is a clear need for both ongoing consciousness raising with all officers of the court, and a complaint mechanism for women who believe their cases have not been properly dealt with. Both of these actions should include not only members of the judiciary and prosecutors, but also court clerks and others who come in direct contact with victims in the judicial process.

The establishment of Family Courts in each district continues to be an ongoing need. Currently, family court matters are dealt with in the districts by Magistrate’s Court, usually at one session per week. These courts are generally overburdened by the number of cases and women’s complaints must wait until the day designated for family court matters. Furthermore, it is more difficult to develop the particular attitudes and approach needed to deal with Family Court matters effectively when they are only one part of the Magistrate’s responsibilities.

A concern related to family court is the need to deal with both civil and criminal matters within one court. Now, a woman who is seeking a Protection Order and/or Maintenance where her abuser has also been charged with a criminal offense must attend two court sessions (and more, with the possibility of delays in proceedings in the criminal offense). Consolidating all matters relating to the abuse in one court facilitates the process for the woman. In the absence of Family Courts in the districts, all matters should be dealt with at the same sitting of the court.

For sexual offenses, the length of time that a case takes to come to trial is a significant concern. For adult victims, going to trial many months, and often years, after the offense was committed is a constant reminder of the assault. One informant noted that frequent adjournments leave victims with the sense that the courts see the abuse as “a petty matter”. This is equally true for young women and girls who are sexually abused. In the latter case, an additional consideration mentioned by prosecutors is that when a considerable time has passed between the offense and the trial, the girl has gotten older and is not seen by the jury as a credible victim.

---

63 Belize National Gender Policy 2002, p 49
64 This need has been endorsed by the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents, organizations such as Youth Enhancement Services (in their 2004 and 2006 policy papers), and others working with women and children.
65 Although one women’s advocate reported that the Magistrate in that district often held court for only about three hours per day.
Both the survivors and systems focus groups, as well as other informants, stressed the need for DNA evidence in the prosecution of sexual offenses. This is especially true for the prosecution of carnal knowledge cases, where the perpetrators often deny responsibility for the sexual abuse.

Young women and girls, and all children who are abused, need particular protection in the court process. In 2002, a policy was made to allow sexually abused children to testify behind screens which would protect them from visual contact with their abusers. This policy, however, has not been implemented, apparently because resources have not been provided to acquire the necessary screens. One informant cited the need for family friendly spaces in courts, and for separate entrances where children can come to court away from the view of the offender and others. Ongoing work is needed to identify further ways of facilitating the testimony of young victims.

The Director of Public Prosecutions and others have called for the appointment of a Crown Counsel dedicated to sexual offenses. This would help facilitate the prosecution of these offenses, as well as the development of the particular skills and attitudes necessary for working with both adult and child victims. This Crown Counsel should be available to prosecute sexual offenses in both Supreme Court and Magistrate’s Court. In their position paper on sexual abuse and exploitation of young women and girls, they noted...

When matters related to sexual abuse are heard in Magistrate’s Court, additional problems occur. Often, offenders are represented by attorneys, while the prosecution is carried forward by a civilian prosecutor. There are reports where the very presence of an attorney intimidates all others involved, and some magistrates appear to give more weight to the defense in these cases. Sexual abuse victims deserve representation that is as strong as that available to the offender.66

Many informants noted that there is often a tremendous gap between the protections set forth in various pieces of legislation and the realities of implementation by the police and courts. Closing that gap will require ownership of the problem by both the police and judiciary, and ongoing vigilance to ensure that the rights of victims of gender-based violence are safeguarded.

For women in Maya communities, the traditional alcalde system is often seen as the primary mechanism for resolving disputes and protecting rights. Women in communities relatively accessible to police and court in town may sometimes use these avenues to report incidents of violence. However, women in more isolated villages look to the alcalde as the arbitrator for the community. Given that the dominance of men in the household is still very strong in these communities, there is a need for ongoing community education on women’s rights, including the right to be protected from violence. In particular, there is a need for a programme of education for Maya community leaders – alcaldes and village chairmen – on their role in preserving these rights, and their responsibility to intervene whether or not the woman comes forward to make a complaint. Women who participated in the community consultations in Maya villages agreed that such education was needed to create a better response to women. These education programmes need to be ongoing, as the positions of alcalde and village chairman change every two and three years respectively.

66 Youth Enhancement Services, It’s Time to Act Against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Young Women and Girls, p 8
4.2.3. Health Care Services

Quality health care services and a positive response from service providers are very important for victims of violence against women. The health care system has several functions in this respect: providing treatment for injuries sustained as a result of violence; taking evidence that may be used at trial; and providing a supportive environment for the women involved.

Unfortunately, hospitals and other health care services often fall short of meeting these needs. Women’s advocates and survivors of violence say that attending to abused women is often not seen by hospitals as a priority. One informant described a hospital where staff wanted to get rid of a domestic violence victim so the bed could be used for a “real” sick person. In other cases, doctors are reluctant to treat sexual offense victims because they do not want to go to court.

Women also describe the lack of implementation of clear protocols and policies for the medical system. The systems focus group pointed out that even where protocols exist, they are often not used. The result is that response to abused women and girls is often the result of the attitudes of individual health care providers – good or bad. There is a need to review existing protocols, revise them where necessary, and ensure that these are implemented in health care facilities countrywide. Women need information on what they should expect from hospitals and other health care facilities so that they can hold those facilities accountable.

KHMH is the only hospital in the country with a medical social worker. This one social worker is expected to respond not only to victims of violence against women, but also to new mothers, trauma victims and other patients needing information and support. No social workers are attached to other hospitals. This means that victims of gender-based violence are often left with no one to talk to and no support.

Participants in all focus groups stressed need for specialist doctors to examine and treat victims of sexual offenses. In Belize City, the Department of Human Services often uses private doctors in cases of sexual abuse of girls to ensure a sensitive and effective response. This has caused some resentment among staff at Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital (KHMH) and appears to have reinforced the idea that putting effort into responding to victims of sexual abuse is a “waste of time.” It is unlikely that this tension will change in the absence of a more consistent, country wide policy in this area.

Survivors of violence and systems representatives both report that emergency contraceptives are not available for victims of sexual violence. The provision of emergency contraceptives should be an essential part of any protocol for rape and sexual abuse victims, and supplies of such contraceptives should be available in all health facilities for this purpose. At the present time, emergency contraceptives are available through some pharmacies. However, the availability has not been widely publicized, due to concern in some quarters that women will use this method for regular contraception. As a result, many women are unaware that emergency contraceptives exist and are available in Belize.

---

67 Medical social workers are social workers who work in hospitals or other health care settings.
68 Participant in systems focus group.
As mentioned previously, there is a *link between violence against women and the risk of HIV/AIDS*. A soon to be published study by the Ministry of Health and PAHO recognizes this link. The study notes that women who are forced to have sex without protection or who are raped are even more likely to be infected than other women because this type of sex causes more injuries to the vaginal and anal tissues. Post exposure prophylaxis – short term antiretroviral treatment to reduce the chance of HIV infection after possible exposure – should be available to all rape and sexual abuse victims.

Furthermore, this risk of HIV infection is not restricted to women who are raped or abused by strangers or acquaintances. Women who are abused by intimate partners also face higher risk, given the virtual impossibility for women to negotiate safe sex under the threat or reality of violence. This means that information on the risk of HIV, counseling and support to access testing should be available to all women who are victims of gender-based violence.

Of course, women in rural areas have an even greater difficulty in accessing health services. Not only do they face the problem of the cost and availability of transportation, they may also be unable to leave their village because of the threat of violence. One possible way to address this could be the strengthening of community health workers to give treatment and support in instances of violence against women. This would include providing training for the workers. One informant also suggested that the community health workers might also be provided with a small fund to provide transportation assistance to women without funds who need to access medical care outside the village.

4.2.4. Social Services and Psychological Support

Public sector social services in Belize are organized through the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, specifically through the Department of Human Services. The main responsibility of the Department in responding to violence against women is to work with victims of child sexual abuse as part of their mandate of child protection. A protocol is in place for the implementation of this mandate.

One of the problems encountered by social workers as they carry out their responsibilities is a *lack of information and coordination with the judicial system*. For example, when bail conditions are breached by an alleged offender making contact with his young victim, social workers report that they are frustrated that the police often do not respond to the breach. As a result, social workers are unable to protect their clients from the abuser. There is a need for more regular, structured networking among workers across systems for problem solving of such concerns.

Another area where the Department of Human Services has a limited role is in providing women with no other means of economic support with some financial assistance. Indigent families are now eligible for $10 per person, per week to a maximum of $60. This amount, of course, is woefully inadequate for a woman and her children under any circumstances. As one shelter worker noted, women fleeing violent situations, “run with nothing – no food, no clothing, no Pampers”. Additional emergency financial assistance should be available to these women. The survivors focus group identified fast, accessible, practical help as critical for women escaping violent situation.

---

69 Ministry of Health/PAHO, *The HIV Epidemic in Belize: Toward a Gender-Based Response*
A major problem for the Department of Human Services is **lack of staff resources**. This is particularly serious in the districts, where a single social worker is expected to serve a wide area, including rural villages. Like the police in these areas, social workers are expected to compete for access to a vehicle to attend to reports of child abuse or to follow-up with their young clients. Organizations such as Youth Enhancement Services have called for at least one additional social worker to be assigned to each district, and that social workers must have a vehicle assigned to them for priority use in the identification and support of abuse victims.70

*Counseling and support in the public sector for adult victims of violence against women is even more limited.* In Belize City, the Community Counseling Centre is staffed by one counselor and two part-time volunteers. Counselors see both individual women and couples. The Centre is used for referral by both the Women’s Department and Family Court, as well as the Community Rehabilitation Department and schools. The Director of the Centre, however, says that they have been hesitant to advertise the Centre broadly out of concern that they will be unable to respond to many more clients. Outside of Belize City, there are no counseling facilities. Some advocates refer women to psychiatric nurses attached to clinics, but these resources are also stretched thin.

As a department of the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, the Women’s Department is also a part of the public sector system of social services and counseling. Because of the particular role the Department has played in the development of responses to violence against women, its work is described separately in Section 4.3.

### 4.2.5. The Education System

Schools have an important role to play, both in the identification and support of girls (and boys) suffering from sexual abuse and in changing the attitudes and conditions that promote violence against women.

Schools are often not safe places for girls and young women. Informants report a culture of sexual aggression in many schools, including primary schools. Girls learn that being on the receiving end of sexually aggressive behaviour is a normal part of life. Boys learn that it is OK to be sexually aggressive.

It is extremely important that issues related to sexuality, including sexual violence, be addressed in the schools. However, there is considerable variation in how these issues are covered depending on the school management and the comfort level of the teachers. Many teachers are uncomfortable dealing sex and sexuality in the classroom. Dealing with violence against women may be even more difficult for some teachers because they are survivors of violence themselves. A solution to this problem would be for each school management to have a group of **specialist teachers** who travel to different schools to work with the students on these issues.

Schools also have a role to play in the identification of sexual abuse among their students and in providing support to students who have been sexually abused. In addition to raising consciousness about gender-based violence in the classroom, this requires a close working

---

70 Youth Enhancement Services, *It’s Time to Act Against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Young Women and Girls*, p 10
relationship with the Department of Human Services to ensure a response to reported cases. One school manager expressed frustration that social workers did not respond to or follow up on some reported cases. She suggested that there should be a specific contact within the department with responsibility for responding to reports from schools.

In addition, schools need counselors who can establish the trust necessary for students to disclose experiences of abuse. Many schools currently have no counselors in place. One suggestion is that any school with over 200 – 300 students should have a full-time counselor. Larger schools should have an additional counselor, and smaller schools could share a counselor among several schools.

In addition to identifying specific instances of sexual abuse and challenging the atmosphere of sexual aggression that exists in many schools, the education system also has a role to play in changing beliefs about masculinity and empowering girls to be strong and independent. This will require a critical look at the messages currently communicated in our schools and the changes needed to promote a society based on gender equality.

### 4.3. The Women’s Department

Since the early 1990s, the Women’s Department has been at the forefront of work on violence against women in Belize. Initial work was motivated in part by CARICOM model domestic violence legislation coming from a 1990 meeting of Ministers with Responsibility for Women, held in Belize. In addition, the work of non-governmental organizations such as Women against Violence and others was bringing violence against women to public attention and raising awareness that abuse of women is not a “family matter”.

Since that time, the Department has worked on these issues at every level: providing immediate support to victims of domestic violence; doing public education; training police and other systems to improve their response; developing policy and legislation; and working to mainstream a more effective response to violence against women at all levels.

The Department operates with a small staff, including one Women’s Development Officer in each district. Addressing the issue of Domestic Violence takes the greatest part of the human resources available, especially in providing information, support and advocacy for individual women who suffer from domestic violence, including court advocacy and accompaniment. Table 6 shows the number of individual contacts with clients for domestic violence and other matters in 2008. Considering that most women seeking help for domestic violence need more time and support than those coming for other reasons, it is easy to see that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of Clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DV Cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corozal</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Walk</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stann Creek</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>779</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

responding to domestic violence puts a considerable strain on the Department's limited human resources.

One of the areas to suffer in this process is **work with rural women**. As previously mentioned, rural women are often isolated, lack awareness of their rights, and have few avenues for personal development. All of these things are linked to vulnerability to violence. One of the mandates of the Women’s Department is to do outreach with rural women to build the skills and confidence they need to live safer, more secure and more rewarding lives. Fulfilling this mandate cannot be a part-time endeavour. The Department needs additional staff in the districts (including Belize district) with particular responsibility for outreach to rural women and the transportation that will allow them to carry out their responsibilities. Ideally, these outreach workers should be fluent in the primary language spoken in rural areas in the district.

The heavy workload that comes from the Department’s focus on domestic violence means that **other issues often get put to the side**. This includes direct response to those issues, public education, as well as research and policy development. This situation has been made worse by the demise of several women’s NGOs and the lack of civil society organizations focused on violence against women. There is a pressing need to address this need.71

Another responsibility of the Department is chairing the **National Committee on Gender-Based Violence**. This Committee is charged with the implementation of the National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence. As noted previously, there are problems with both the content of the Plan and with generating firm commitment from members to participate fully. Lack of will at the highest levels in the public sector is one significant factor contributing to this. There are also difficulties in ensuring that the discussions occurring at the committee level are shared throughout the systems and organizations that have representation on the committee.

Plans are already in place to develop a new, more focused plan of action on gender-based violence. In addition, the Committee needs to review its membership and mandate, to ensure the most effective development and implementation of policies and programmes.

There is also a need for mechanisms that will support a stronger response in the public sector and civil society respectively. The public sector needs to work on mainstreaming the response into all systems and concentrate efforts to generate commitment from the highest level on down. More attention needs to be paid to how best to accomplish this. On the other hand, civil society organizations need a forum where they can focus attention on how to most effectively develop and implement services, education and advocacy outside of government. An effective response on violence against women should recognize not only the need for effective communication between the public sector and civil society, but also the particular roles and responsibilities of each.

---

71 Except for the two women’s shelters, and the work of Youth Enhancement Services on sexual abuse of young women and girls.

72 This will be discussed more in Section 4.5: Civil Society Response
4.4. Work with Men

Violence against women is, of course, ultimately about male behaviour. If we can find ways to stop that behaviour, we remove the threat to women. Most of the attention in Belize and the Caribbean has focused on intervention with batterers.

Many informants to this review cautioned against being overconfident about the impact of counseling and other programmes for batterers. They pointed out that many men go to counseling only to convince the woman to return to the relationship. The women’s advocates focus group stated that programmes for men won’t work if the only motivation is a court order or to get the woman back. They also stressed the need to monitor the effects of such programmes so women are not put at greater risk.

Another informant also expressed skepticism about programmes for men. She said that she wouldn’t discourage these programmes, but that it needs to be made “very, very clear” to the partners of the women that they need to be prepared in the event that the violence happens again. She suggested that those implementing batterer’s programmes need also to work with the women to develop a safety plan. In addition, there is a need to carefully monitor the participants in the programme and maintain contact with the woman to ensure her wellbeing.

Belize will soon begin the implementation of Partnership for Peace: A Violence Intervention Programme. This programme was developed by UNIFEM following the 2003 ECLAC/CIDA conference on the Gender-Based Violence and the Administration of Justice in the Caribbean. It was first implemented in Granada by the Legal Aid and Counseling Clinic, with the first cycle taking place from August 2005 to February 2006. Given the success of the first cycle, magistrates in Grenada encouraged the continuation of the programme. Since that time, the programme has been initiated in St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica.

The programme is based on principles that include prioritizing the safety and protection of women victims of violence and acknowledging accountability and responsibility by the perpetrator. The key elements of the programme are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Partnership for Peace A Violence Prevention Programme Outline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Understanding and Managing Feelings Part 1: Anger Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Understanding and Managing Feelings Part 2: Managing Life’s Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Effective communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Conflict Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Family History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Manhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Womanhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Power and Control in Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Sexuality, STI’s and HIV Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Fatherhood and the Effects of Violence on Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Stress Management and Trauma Recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) Substance Abuse Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) Domestic Violence and the Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) Relapse Prevention and Personal Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• domestic abuse is conceptualized as part of “pattern of coercive control”;
• abuse is solely the responsibility of the perpetrator and victims should never be blamed for men's abuse;
• counseling is not guaranteed to end the violence and that such intervention is not intended to salvage relationships.\(^{73}\)

Participants are directed to the programme by the courts. They attend a two-hour session once a week for 16 weeks. Table 7 outlines the topics covered in these sessions. There are no current plans to provide support to the partners of programme participants or to monitor the results of the programme with input from them.

The Women’s Department has acknowledged that implementing the Partnership for Peace programme in Belize will be challenging, and that there will be a good deal of problem solving that needs to be done, especially during the first cycle. Nevertheless, the Department is confident that *the positive results seen by the programme so far in other Caribbean jurisdictions can be replicated in Belize.*

### 4.5. Civil Society Response

The late 1990s saw the demise of several important women’s NGOs in Belize, including Women Against Violence (WAV), the Belize Organization for Women and Development (BOWAND), and the Belize Rural Women’s Association (BRWA). The absence of strong women’s NGOs has had a significant effect on efforts to address violence against women and other important issues.

Nevertheless, civil society organizations continue to play a key role in addressing violence against women. Strengthening the ability of these organizations to provide services, do public education, and develop a stronger analysis of the role of violence against women in maintaining gender inequality is critical.

Belize currently has two NGOs operating women’s shelters and other services for victims of domestic violence. **Haven House** in Belize District opened in 1993. It provides emergency shelter and related services such as counseling and court advocacy. Women can stay at the shelter for a maximum of 21 days. Recently they have also acquired two second-stage transition houses where women can stay for a longer period. Women in the second-stage housing must be in a position to pay the utilities while staying in the house. In addition to providing direct services to women, Haven House does outreach and education in the community and advocacy to improve systems response to battered women.

**Mary Open Doors** (in the Cayo district) began as a support group for battered women. In early 2008, the organization opened its shelter. Women and their children can stay at the shelter for up to three months. Mary Open Doors also provides basic counseling and court advocacy, and a support group open to women whether or not they are residents of the shelter. At this point, Mary Open Doors functions entirely with volunteer staff.

\(^{73}\) UNIFEM Partnership for Peace project document
Participants in the women’s advocates focus group noted the need for additional shelter facilities. They also recommended strong networking between districts, to allow women to move to another district if they choose to do so. Because of Belize’s small size, providing safe shelter is a challenge, and some women may be safer if they move to a different community.

The focus group also stressed, however, that shelter facilities are not enough. Many women do not go to a shelter, but still need practical support, counseling and advocacy in their dealings with the court and other systems. Furthermore, women who are victims of sexual offenses by strangers or acquaintances also need crisis services.

Women’s advocates, and in particular shelter workers, emphasize the importance of victim advocacy and accompaniment in dealings with the police, court and other systems. They note that women do get a better response when they are not facing these systems alone. Given the many ongoing barriers women face in all systems, strengthening this role is extremely important.

Shelter workers and other victim advocates also stressed the need for practical help for battered women – transportation, food and shelter. These are critical needs for many victims of violence, especially since women are most often not only responsible for themselves, but for their children as well. As mentioned in the section on the social service response, there is a need for increased emergency support for women in violent situations.

Another NGO working in the area of violence against women is Youth Enhancement Services (YES), an organization responding to the needs of young women and girls. YES is based in Belize District, but provides some presentations and workshops in other districts. YES operates a Training Centre for girls out of the mainstream educational system, a Centre for Teenage Mothers, and an Outreach Programme for young women and girls (including the YES Leadership Group).

In 2003, YES decided to make advocacy a more integral part of its work. The organization decided to take on the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation of young women and girls. As part of this work, YES developed a broad public awareness campaign using the slogan No Means No – Use Your Voice – Stop Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. They also developed a position paper on reforms to laws and enforcement on sexual abuse.

In 2007-8, YES received funding from the ILO to implement a project on the commercial sexual exploitation of underage children (CSEC) in the Belize and Cayo Districts. This project included providing direct support for victims and others at risk; networking and coordination among community services; and raising public awareness of the issue. While the project is now over, YES continues to respond to victims of both CSEC and non-commercial sexual abuse. However, the CSEC project demonstrates some of the problems with limited term funding. After the project has finished, the needs remain – and increasingly come

---

74 This is true whether the accompaniment is done by shelter workers or other civil society groups or by the Women’s Department WDOs.
75 A description of the process of defining their advocacy work can be found in Debra Lewis, Making Change for Young Women and Girls: the YES Advocacy Book.
76 The paper was first produced in 2004, and reviewed and revised in 2006 as It’s Time to Act Against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Young Women and Girls.
forward because of heightened awareness – but the resources to meet those needs are no longer available.

The **Women's Issues Network of Belize (WIN-Belize)** is a network of women's organizations and other groups with an interest in women's issues. As a network, it does not provide direct services, but concentrates its attention on strengthening member organizations, developing public awareness on women's issues, and advocacy.

WIN-Belize facilitates sessions on gender based violence for women’s groups, youth groups and faith-based organizations. It also **promotes public awareness** through an annual countryside Torch Run.

Like the women’s advocates and systems focus group, WIN-Belize identifies **stronger collaboration among groups** as key to developing a stronger response to violence against women. They also recognize the need for **effective monitoring and evaluation** of responses to violence.

Based in Dangriga, the **Productive Organization for Women in Action (POWA)** is Belize’s strongest community based women’s group involved in issues related to violence against women and HIV/AIDS. The group provides support to women, including survivors of violence and women who are HIV positive, as well as referrals to relevant agencies. They do community outreach in neighbourhoods and “edutainment” activities such as rallies and Women's Night Out, which include content on both violence against women and HIV/AIDS. They are also involved in community mobilization against violence.

The experience of POWA demonstrates the importance of a **community based response** to violence against women. It also shows that it is critical to connect issues such as violence against women and the feminization of HIV to an understanding of gender discrimination and women’s subordination. The work of POWA can provide some useful lessons for women organizing in other parts of Belize.

Some other organizations, while not focused particularly on violence against women, include this issue in their educational programmes for women and communities. For example, the **Toledo Maya Women’s Council (TMWC)** includes a 3-hour session on family violence as part of their **Healthy Mother/Healthy Baby** project. Staff at TMWC agree that there is a need for more education on violence against women in Maya communities.

Those working on violence against women in civil society organizations recognize the need for a **stronger, more coordinated response**. There is a vital need for more services for victims of violence, as well as outreach and public awareness programmes, especially in rural areas. Monitoring and evaluation of both public sector and civil society response is much needed. There is also a need for more research and analysis of violence against women and its connection to broader issues of gender inequality.

In 2007 the Women’s Department commissioned a **feasibility study for a Belize gender-based violence crisis centre**[77]. The study proposed a large, Belize City based centre that would provide outreach services to the districts. The proposed centre has professionals on staff to work with victims of violence, including a medical officer, psychiatrist, legal officer, mediator,

---

77 Barrow, Carmen M., *Feasibility Study Report for a Belize Gender-Based Violence Crisis Center*
counselor and three intake officers/social workers. It also includes a Communications Officer and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer as well as an Executive Director, clerical and cleaning staff.

The model proposed by the study is appealing because it recognizes the problem of victims of violence having to go from place to place to access services and support. However, the model is also unnecessarily bureaucratic, and does not address a number of critical concerns:

- **By proposing a single crisis service in Belize City**, the model does not address **the needs of women in the districts and, in particular, rural women**. Services for victims of violence must be accessible – a centralized centre simply cannot provide these services on an outreach basis. Participants in the women's advocates focus group were unanimous that a Belize City based centre would not meet the needs of women in the districts.

- **Experience has shown that services with strong ties to the communities they serve are likely seen as more accessible and more supportive** to women. The proposed crisis centre is based on a “top down” model that does not promote community participation or support.

- **The most critical role of crisis services comes is their advocacy for women with the systems. Shelter workers at Mary Open Doors say that their success comes not from a “professional/client” model of working, but because women see them as part of a sisterhood who will stand up for them.** As they say, “It's what makes Mary Open Doors a success.”

- **The model is expensive; particularly considering it provides services only in Belize City.** The document outlines start-up costs of almost $250,000 and an annual budget of approximately $650,000 - $770,000.

- **The model does not address the long term need to mainstream better response into all public agencies responding to victims of violence.**

A more appropriate model for developing crisis services for victims of violence against would address the need for these services country wide and build on work that is already taking place. It would also address the need for more networking and collaboration among women’s groups across Belize who are working in this area. Furthermore, the model should link the providing services and public education to developing a deeper analysis of violence against women and its roots in gender inequality and women’s subordination.

This alternative approach could include the following:

---

78 The report bases its decision to locate a single centre in Belize City in part on the number of complaints already received by agencies there. This does not, however, account for the fact that there may well be more complaints in Belize City because some services are already more accessible there and that there is likely more awareness of violence against women among urban women, making these women somewhat more likely to seek support. Where services are lacking and awareness is low, the number of women coming forward will also be low. An important part of any strategy for crisis services must be to reach those women.

79 There is some inconsistency in the figures provided. The breakdown of salaries shows a total of $585,132.40 (Barrow, *op cit* p 52) while the salary figure included in the overall budget is $464,908 (p 51).
• The establishment of a country wide network of NGOs/CBOs already working in the area of violence against women. This network would be based on the principle of building a stronger movement against violence against women, including providing services and support, building greater understanding of the issue, increasing public awareness, and advocacy for change.

• The network would support the establishment of violence against women crisis centres in each district, and link those centres to this wider movement.

• Where appropriate, crisis centres would be built on the work of existing organizations. In districts where these organizations do not exist, the network could draw on the experience elsewhere to work with women in that district to establish new groups.

Another important issue in developing crisis services for women is whether these services should be for women, or for both women and men. While some informants favoured services for both women and men, the majority believed that women who are victims of violence need women-only services. This does not mean, of course, that men who are victimized should not receive attention, only that services for men should be provided through a different agency or organization. Reasons for favouring women-only services included:

• Women need the safety and security that women-only services provide.
• There are different skills needed for working with women and men. Workers in services that are primarily for women may not have the skills to respond appropriately to men.
• There are times when a woman will make a complaint of violence and a man will make a counter-complaint. Women will not have faith in the ability of the centre to advocate for her if her partner is also being represented.

Most informants conceded that women-only services would likely not turn away a man who sought their help, but that the services should be promoted as women’s centres.

4.6. Ending Violence Against Women in Belize

Developing an effective response to violence against women requires both changes in legislation, policies and programmes, and change in attitudes that allow this violence to flourish.

Experience in Belize has shown that social communications campaigns have a significant impact in this process. The Women’s Department’s work to raise awareness on domestic violence and the efforts of Youth Enhancement Services to draw attention to the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation of young women and girls are two good examples of the use of media and other awareness strategies. This heightened awareness has not only raised the consciousness of the public, it can also play an important role in motivating government action on these issues.
Experience has also shown that the most effective legislative and policy reform has been driven by three things: the influence of international and regional commitments\textsuperscript{80}, the commitment of those working in the public sector\textsuperscript{81}; and effective advocacy by vibrant civil society organizations. One informant noted that the advances made on issues related to violence against women in the 1990’s were the result of these three factors working together. Many of the informants to this review mentioned the strengthening the capacity of women’s groups and organizations to develop a strong, independent voice as important to the process of change.

One objective of this review was to assess the conditions that have contributed to reducing violence against women and the constraints that contributed to its increase. In an overall sense, this is simply impossible to do at this point, given the lack of both qualitative and quantitative research on this issue in Belize. Most informants believed that violence against women has increased in recent years, and speculated on some of the causes for this, including the role of the media in portraying women as acceptable targets for violence and abuse.\textsuperscript{82}

While more research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies intended to reduce violence, we do know what makes a difference for some women. Women in the survivors focus group and community consultations talked about the importance of breaking down women’s isolation. They said that getting education and support from women and women’s organizations was important in making them less vulnerable to violence. This leads to the conclusion that strengthening women’s groups at the community level can have an impact for many women.

Women in the survivors focus group emphasized the role of violence as the ultimate tool of power and control over women. In Belize and across the Caribbean, it has been acknowledged that violence against women is based on a system of gender inequality and women’s subordination. In the long run, therefore, ending violence against women requires changing this system. There must be a greater focus on the link between the cause (the system) and the symptoms (including gender-based violence) in the public discourse on this issue. Support for programmes that empower women economically and socially must also be part of this long term strategy.

Changing male behaviour requires work on redefining masculinity in our society. This work needs to be done by men who acknowledge a system of gender inequality as the foundation of violence against women. These men must develop a consciousness of how this system has affected their own development as men, as well as how it leads to violence as a means of controlling women.

Ending violence against women, and all signs of gender inequality and women’s subordination, requires vision and commitment. It calls for women who are willing to stand up for their rights and men who are willing to challenge a system of male power over women. In the meantime, concrete actions are needed to ensure that the victims of violence against women receive the response they need to escape the violence and lead safe and secure lives.

\textsuperscript{80} And the practical support of international and regional organizations connected to those commitments.

\textsuperscript{81} Particular note must be made of the role of the Women’s Department in this process.

\textsuperscript{82} While detailed examination of the role of the media in contributing to violence against women was outside of the boundaries of this review, several informants agreed that more documentation and analysis is needed in this area.
5. The Way Forward: Guiding Principles

Developing policies and plans to address this or any other issue should be based on a set of principles to guide the work. These principles provide the context within which specific legislation, policies and programmes should be developed. They ensure that everyone is “on the same page” in the development of this response.

These are the principles that should guide all work in the area of violence against women:

1) The response to violence against women must be based on understanding the roots of this violence in a system of gender inequality and women’s subordination.

2) All programmes must put the safety and security of women and children first.

3) Confidentiality must be guaranteed to all victims of violence against women.

4) Each system responsible for violence against women must develop its own plan for ensuring a positive response. This plan must be focused, delegate clear responsibility for implementation, provide adequate resources, and include a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. Those at the highest level of the systems and Ministries responsible for them must take ownership of the implementation of these plans.

5) Guaranteeing a fast and effective police response must be a high priority. Women’s confidence in this response can only be assured through the implementation of mechanisms for external oversight of police actions.

6) Civil society, and in particular women and women’s organizations, has a critical role to play in advocating for individual women needing protection and support, as well as in advocacy for changes in public sector policies and practice. It also has an important responsibility in developing a deeper understanding of the roots of violence against women and in raising public awareness of this.

7) Government must demonstrate the political will to take action to address violence against women. A key part of demonstrating this political will is in providing the human and financial resources necessary for an effective response.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations on improving the response to violence against women are based on the problem areas identified in this review and are grounded by the guiding principles outlined above.

Understanding violence and raising awareness

Recommendation 1: Civil society organizations and academic institutions should increase efforts to develop an understanding of the root causes of violence against women.
**Recommendation 2:** Civil society organizations and the Women’s Department should cooperate on a public campaign to raise awareness of rape and other sexual violence as a serious breach of women’s human rights.

**Legislation**

**Recommendation 3:** There should be a review and revision of all laws relating to sexual offenses. In particular, this review should look at the definition of rape and indecent assault, and create new offenses that better reflect the range of sexual assaults.

**Recommendation 4:** The offense of marital rape should be incorporated into new definitions for rape and sexual assault to protect all spouses without conditions.

**Recommendation 5:** The legal age for marriage under any circumstances should be raised to at least 16.

**Recommendation 6:** A mechanism for effective monitoring of the new Domestic Violence Act should be put in place.

**Recommendation 7:** There should be a review of the Sexual Harassment Act with particular attention to why it has not been used. As a result of this review, amendments to the Act (if any are needed), a public education strategy and training to ensure effective systems response should be put in place.

**Confidentiality**

**Recommendation 8:** All systems and institutions should develop strict regulations for guaranteeing the confidentiality of victims of violence against women, including clear sanctions for those who breach those regulations.

**Coordination of Systems Response**

**Recommendation 9:** District meetings among representatives of all systems responding to violence against women, currently organized through the National Committee on Gender-Based Violence, should be reviewed and strengthened. These meetings should include police, magistrates, prosecutors, health care workers, social services workers, counselors and representatives of schools, as well as representatives of relevant NGOs. The purpose of these meetings should be to develop effective channels of communication among the different systems and to do problem solving on specific challenges to an effective, coordinated response. Attention should be paid to ensuring that discussions at these meetings are shared throughout the systems and organizations represented at the meetings.

**The Police**

**Recommendation 10:** The police should develop a comprehensive plan for improving response to violence against women, including an expanded training component;
long-term specialist officers for responding to domestic violence; establishing a sexual offenses unit in the Criminal Investigations Branch; and a monitoring system to systematically assess police response.

**Recommendation 11:** The Police should review and strengthen their system of collecting the *Gender-Based Violence Statistics Nationwide* to ensure that all reported incidents are recorded by the system.

**Recommendation 12:** There should be a Citizen Review Board established to handle complaints of police misconduct. In the absence of an overall review board, an external committee should be appointed to deal with complaints concerning police response to violence against women.

**Recommendation 13:** The police should implement a mandatory arrest policy that requires arrest in any incident of domestic violence where there is reasonable evidence to do so. The onus of responsibility to lay a charge should be removed from the victim.

**Recommendation 14:** In conjunction with the Women’s Department, the Office of the Ombudsman should undertake a public awareness campaign to inform people of their ability to use that office for complaints concerning the response of police or any other public sector system to incidents of violence against women. To deal with the additional workload, the Office of the Ombudsman should be staffed with the additional investigators necessary to accomplish this and to ensure a presence for the Office in the districts.

**The Courts**

**Recommendation 15:** Legal Aid should be available to victims of domestic violence. Legal Aid offices should be established in all districts. The Legal Aid Office in Belize City should have at least one additional lawyer to deal with the added workload.

**Recommendation 16:** Family Courts should be established in all districts.

**Recommendation 17:** A DNA laboratory should be established in Belize, with priority given to cases of sexual abuse of children and other sexual offenses.

**Recommendation 18:** Protection of underage victims of sexual abuse should be strengthened. This should include implementation of the existing policy for providing screens in court, as well as additional provisions such as having separate entrances for victims when they arrive to give testimony.

**Recommendation 19:** There should be dedicated Crown Counsel for the prosecution of sexual offenses. These Crown Counsel should be available to work on sexual offense cases in both Supreme Court and Magistrate’s Court.

**Recommendation 20:** Family Court should have the authority to deal with both civil and criminal matters relating to domestic violence. Where Family Courts do not
currently exist, civil and criminal matters should be dealt with at the same session of Magistrate’s Court.

**Recommendation 21:** Training for alcaldes and village chairmen in Maya communities should be developed and implemented. This training should take place at least every 2 years, following the appointment of new alcaldes.

**Health Care Services**

**Recommendation 22:** The Ministry of Health should strengthen its surveillance system for gender-based violence, in particular to ensure that it captures all sexual offenses.

**Recommendation 23:** Health care institutions should review and revise protocols relating to violence against women and put in place a system for monitoring the implementation of those protocols.

**Recommendation 24:** Hospitals should develop materials for the public that define patients’ rights, including what victims of violence against women should expect from health care practitioners.

**Recommendation 25:** Each hospital should have a medical social worker. Because of its larger size, Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital should have a minimum of two medical social workers.

**Recommendation 26:** A system of doctors specializing in gathering evidence and giving testimony in cases sexual abuse and other sexual offenses should be developed and implemented country-wide. The government should contract individual physicians or clinics to play this role. An appropriate funding mechanism must be developed to support this system.

**Recommendation 27:** Emergency contraceptives and post exposure prophylaxis for HIV should be available for victims of rape and sexual abuse in all hospitals and clinics.

**Recommendation 28:** The ability of Community Health Workers in rural villages to respond to violence against women should be enhanced. A training programme in identifying and responding to violence against women should be developed and implemented. Emergency assistance for victims of violence who need transportation to access safety and/or medical services should be available through Community Health Workers.

**Recommendation 29:** The National AIDS Commission should include women who are victims of violence as a highly at-risk population and develop appropriate strategies to address the link between violence against women and HIV/AIDS.
Social Services and Counseling

Recommendation 30: Government should develop a mechanism for providing adequate emergency financial assistance to victims of domestic violence through an appropriate agency.

Recommendation 31: The number of social workers should be increased, particularly in the districts. One additional social worker should be hired in each district. Additional resources should be made available for child protection and other aspects of social service delivery, especially for transportation to rural areas.

Recommendation 32: The Department of Human Services should appoint a specific liaison person to develop a better working relationship with the schools.

The Education System

Recommendation 33: Each school management should appoint specialist teachers to attend different schools and teach matters relating to sex and sexuality, violence against women and children and related matters.

Recommendation 34: Children should have access to counselors who are trained in the identification and response to all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse. Each school should have a counselor.

The Women’s Department

Recommendation 35: The Women’s Department should have one additional Women’s Development Officer in each district with specific responsibility for outreach to rural women.

Recommendation 36: As Chair of the National Committee on Gender-Based Violence, the Women’s Department should initiate a review of the membership and mandate of the Committee.

Recommendation 37: In cooperation with other public sector systems, the Women’s Department should develop a mechanism for developing a stronger public sector response, including the development and implementation of plans within each sector and the improvement of working relationships across sectors. The strengthening of each sector’s ownership of plans and their implementation should be key to this process.

Work with Men

Recommendation 38: Agencies implementing batterers’ intervention programmes (including the forthcoming Partnership for Peace) should also provide services for female partners of programme participants to maximize their safety.
Civil Society

Recommendation 39: Support should be given to NGOs and CBOs working in the area of violence against women to form a national network against violence against women.

Recommendation 40: The national network should be responsible for supporting the creation of Violence Against Women Crisis Centres in each district. Where appropriate, these centres should build upon the work already being done in some districts. These crisis centres should operate shelter facilities as well as a women’s centre at a separate location.

Recommendation 41: The government should implement a secure mechanism for providing an adequate level of financial support to each Crisis Centre. The level of support should be reviewed on a regular basis and increased to reflect rising costs.

Ending Violence Against Women

Recommendation 42: NGOs and academic institutions should be encouraged to do more research and analysis of violence against women and its roots in gender inequality and the subordination of women.

Recommendation 43: Support should be given for the development of men’s organizations or groups working against violence against women who understand the connection between violence against women and the power inequalities between women and men, and who adopt the Guiding Principles contained in this document.
Annex 1: Programmes Addressing Violence Against Women in Belize

Note: Under Services and Other Activities, only those activities directly related to the issue of violence against women are included. Many of these groups also work on other services or issues. Major publications of these groups related to violence against women are listed in the Bibliography.

This list does not include public sector institutions responding to victims of violence against women as part of their overall mandate (eg. police, courts, health care services and social services). The first three organizations are public sector institutions that have a particular role to play in the development and implementation of programmes in this area.

Organization: Women’s Department, Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation
Type of Organization: Government Department
Location: Belize City; District Offices in Corozal, Orange Walk, San Ignacio, Dangriga and Punta Gorda
Services and Other Activities: Information, support and advocacy (including court advocacy) for victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women; Training of police and other systems; Public education and training; Development of educational materials; Policy development.

Organization: National Women’s Commission
Type of Organization: Government Appointed Advisory Body
Location: Belize City; Membership appointed from across Belize
Services and Other Activities: Development of the National Gender Policy, including sections dealing with violence against women and related issues; Monitoring of Gender Policy implementation.

Organization: National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC)
Type of Organization: Government Appointed Advisory Body
Location: Belize City
Services and Other Activities: Advocacy on issues related to child abuse, including child sexual abuse; Monitoring issues relating to families and children included in CEDAW, the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents; and other national policies and commitments;

Organization: Haven House
Type of Organization: Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)
Location: Belize City
Services and Other Activities: Emergency shelter; Support and court advocacy for victims of domestic violence; Presentations and outreach to communities; networking with the private sector; Advocacy on court and hospital policies.
**Organization:** Mary Open Doors  
**Type of Organization:** NGO  
**Location:** San Ignacio, Cayo District  
**Services and Other Activities:** Shelter for Women and Children; Basic counseling; Court Advocacy; Referral; Support Group; Networking with other community agencies.

**Organization:** Youth Enhancement Services (YES)  
**Type of Organization:** NGO  
**Location:** Belize City and Lords Bank (Belize District); Some educational programmes and project implementation in other districts  
**Services and Other Activities:** Counseling and support group for adolescent victims of sexual abuse; Home visits; Care hampers; Educational programmes; Development of educational materials; Advocacy on reform to laws and polices on sexual abuse and exploitation.

**Organization:** Belize Family Life Association (BFLA)  
**Type of Organization:** NGO  
**Location:** Belize City; Branches in Orange Walk; Belmopan; San Ignacio; Dangriga and Punta Gorda  
**Services and Other Activities:** Outreach programmes to schools, including building consciousness on sexual abuse; Youth groups, including training on date rape and violence counseling; Resource Centre for youths; Non-traditional service delivery to commercial sex workers.

**Organization:** Women’s Issues Network of Belize (WIN-Belize)  
**Type of Organization:** NGO/Network  
**Location:** Belize City; members countrywide  
**Services and Other Activities:** Referrals; Facilitation of sessions on gender-based violence in schools, youth groups, and faith-based organizations; public awareness through annual Torch Run.

**Organization:** Productive Organization for Women in Action (POWA)  
**Type of Organization:** Community Based Organization (CBO)  
**Location:** Dangriga (Stann Creek District)  
**Services and Other Activities:** Referral to relevant agencies; Community outreach in neighbourhoods; Edutainment activities, including content on violence against women and HIV/AIDS; Community mobilization against violence.

**Organization:** Toledo Maya Women’s Council  
**Type of Organization:** NGO  
**Location:** Punta Gorda (Toledo District); members from rural Toledo villages  
**Services and Other Activities:** Component on family violence as part of “Healthy Mother/Healthy Baby” educational programme.
Annex 2: Legal and Policy Changes since 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Legal Changes: Legislation or Amendment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Amendment of the Evidence Act to provide greater protection for rape victims during testimony at trial, including disallowing questions concerning the past sexual history of the victim with a person other than the defendant, and the requirement that judges caution juries about acting on the uncorroborated testimony of the victim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Amendment of the Criminal Code to include the offense of Marital Rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Amendment of the Criminal Code to increase penalties for Carnal Knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Amendment of the Families and Children’s Act to require mandatory reporting of incidents of child abuse, including sexual abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Amendment to the regulations of the Families and Children’s Act to allow for the appointment of amicus curiae in child abuse cases and to allow underage witnesses to testify behind a screen to protect the child’s privacy and protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Act (replaces 1992 Act)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Amendment of the Crime Control and Criminal Justice Act to prevent Magistrate’s Court from giving bail to those accused of Carnal Knowledge. Bail applications in these cases must be made to Supreme Court.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policy Changes: Significant policy and institutional changes since 1995 have included:

- The establishment of the Domestic Violence Unit within the Belize Police Department.
- The establishment of the Surveillance System on Gender-Based Violence within the Ministry of Health.
- The revision of the Medico-Legal form to provide more detailed information for the prosecution of sexual abuse cases.
- The establishment of the Human Trafficking committee.
- The implementation of the Women’s Department’s Safe Schools programme.
- The implementation of training for Magistrates on the new Domestic Violence Act.
- The development of a batterers’ intervention programme (Partnership for Peace).

83 Questions designed to elicit information from the systems focus group and other informants on significant policy change elicited limited responses, indicating a lack of “institutional memory”. It may also reflect a lack of documentation, monitoring and evaluation of policy change, with the result that those working in systems lack consciousness of how policies and practice have developed over time.
Annex 3: International Plans, Declarations and Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action</td>
<td>The UN world Conference on Human rights formally recognized that women’s rights are human rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Declaration on the elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW)</td>
<td>DEVAW defined violence against women, linked it to human rights, and called on governments to take specific steps to eliminate it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belem Do Para)</td>
<td>Belem Do Para was a convention among nations of the Americas region that recognized violence against women as a human rights violation and called on states to act against it. Belize ratified the convention in 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action</td>
<td>The Beijing Platform of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women set out several key objectives for governments to focus on in addressing violence against women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
<td>The optional protocol to CEDAW allows individual and groups to bring petitions on violations of the convention to the CEDAW committee. Belize has opted out of these sections of the protocol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Millennium Declaration</td>
<td>The Millennium Declaration pledged to combat violence against women and implement CEDAW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>The Declaration of Commitment recognized the elimination of violence against women as key to the reduction of women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>CARICOM Plan for Mainstreaming Gender into Key CARICOM Programmes</td>
<td>The CARICOM Plan of Action links inequities of power in sexual relationships to increased risk for HIV/AIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality</td>
<td>The Plan urges Commonwealth members to adopt an integrated, zero-tolerance approach to fighting gender-based violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>United National Commission on Human Rights Resolution on Violence Against Women</td>
<td>The resolution recognizes violence against women as both a cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>United Nations World Summit</td>
<td>States agreed to continue efforts to eradicate violence against women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>United Nations Resolution on the Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women</td>
<td>Following the report of the Secretary-General on the in-depth study of all forms of violence against women, the resolution urges states to take action to eliminate violence against women, adequately supported and facilitated by strong institutional mechanisms and financing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted in part from The Centre For Women's Global Leadership, 16 Days Bibliography and Resource List
Annex 4: Bibliography

Belize Resources

Barrow, Carmen M., *Feasibility Study Report for A Belize Gender-Based Violence Crisis Center*, Women’s Department, Ministry of Human Development (Belize City) 2007

Belize Police Department/Joint Intelligence Coordinating Centre, *Gender Based Violence Statistics Nationwide*, 2006 - 2008


Epidemiology Unit, Ministry of Health (Belize), *Gender Based Violence Statistics 2005 - 2008*


Lewis, Debra, *Making Change for Young Women and Girls: The YES Advocacy Book*, Youth Enhancement Services (Belize City) 2004

Ministry of Health, *National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy* (Belize) 2002

Ministry of Health/PAHO, *The HIV Epidemic in Belize: Toward a Gender-Based Response*, (Belize) in process.


Parades, Sandra, *Situational Analysis of Gender and Development: Belize*, National Women’s Commission (Belize City) 2002

62


United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of the third and fourth periodic report: Belize*, 2007

Women’s Department, *Annual Report (Belize) 2007 and 2008*

Women’s Department, *Family Violence Protocol: a guide for mainstreaming services to victims of Domestic Violence (Belize) 2004*


Youth Enhancement Services, *YES Position Paper on Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Young Women and Girls: Reform to Laws and Enforcement on Sexual Abuse, Youth Enhancement Services (Belize City) 2004*

Youth Enhancement Services, *It’s Time to Act Against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Young Women and Girls: 2006 YES Position Paper on Reform to Laws and Enforcement on Sexual Abuse, Youth Enhancement Services (Belize City) 2006*

**Regional and Other Resources**


Barriteau, Violet Eudine, *Examining the issues of men, male marginalization and masculinity in the Caribbean: Policy Implications*, Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies (Cave Hill) 2000


Kempadoo, Kamala with Andy Taitt, *Gender, Sexuality and Implications for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean: A Review of Literature and Programmes*, UNIFEM/IRDC (Barabados) 2006

Lewis, Linden, *Unsettling Masculinity in the Caribbean: Facing a Future Without Guarantees*, Centre for Gender and Development Students, University of the West Indies (Cave Hill) 2003

Lewis, Linden, “Envisioning a Politics of Change within Caribbean Gender Relations”, in Patricia Mohammed (ed.) *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, University of the West Indies Press (Barbados) 2002 pp 512-530


Nurse, Keith, *Feminism and Masculinity*, “Feminism and Masculinity”, CAFRA News 2002

Report of the ECLAC – CDCC/CIDA Gender Equity Programme Regional Conference on Gender-Based Violence and the Administration of Justice (Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago), February 3-5, 2003

Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Gender Socialization and Domestic Violence: Developing a Research Agenda (Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago), December 9-10, 2002


UNIFEM/ECLAC, *Eliminating Gender-Based Violence, Ensuring Equality: UNIFEM/ECLAC Regional Assessment of Actions to End Violence Against Women in the Caribbean*, UNIFEM (Christ Church, Barbados) 2005

UNite to End Violence Against Women/The UN Secretary General’s Campaign to End Violence Against Women, *Fact Sheets* (New York) 2008


Annex 5: Terms of Reference

Consultancy for national Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women

Background

Violence against women is a critical dimension of gender inequality. It is both a result and cause of gender inequality. It is a violation on human rights. Additionally, the health, community and economic costs of gender violence undermine poverty alleviation efforts.

This consultancy has been developed to assist in developing of a national framework to address GBV issues. The assessment is being undertaken within a human rights framework, based on the recognition that women's social, economic, civil and political rights are causally connected and mutually reinforcing. The primary focus of the review will be on policies and programs that address the two most common forms of gender-based violence against women and girls:

a) physical, psychological and economic violence against women by intimate partners
b) all forms of sexual violence against women and girls, whether perpetrated by partners or others.

Interventions at national, regional and local levels will be included in the review, as well as programmes encompassing different sector-based approaches (education, justice, health, social welfare, etc.). Both government and civil society programmes will be considered. The assessment will address unique challenges and particular emphasis will be placed on identifying successful multisectoral approaches that might be suitable for scaling up. In addition, the assessment will draw on global experiences to suggest new approaches that might be appropriately adapted to the needs of the region. Consideration will be given to programmes that aim to prevent violence against women, to programmes that increase women's access to justice and support services and programmes that address boys and men as partners in the work on ending violence against women.

The objectives are:

1) Analyse specific situations of VAW so as to increase understanding of other dimensions of violence and to identify emerging contextual issues.

For the purposes of the assessment, particular attention will be paid to the issues of the male marginalization thesis and of HIV/AIDS, taking into account socio-economic conditions. How are these emerging issues influencing trends and characteristics of VAW? How have they contributed to the intensification of existing, or new, forms of VAW?

2) What conditions contributed to reducing VAW, and what constraints contributed to its increase?

Consider the strategies pursued by the state and by civil society in different kinds of intervention and, the progress made and difficulties encountered in addressing this issue from the governmental level, in terms of laws, policies and programmes.
3) Examine the institutional changes across key institutions (administration of justice, social services, health, education, etc.)

What were these changes? How did they contribute to ending VAW? Who were the other actors (governmental/NGO – persons, groups and networks) involved and what was their role and impact? What were their achievements and constraints? How did they implement their mandates in relation to VAW (procedures, institutional assets, capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of the implementing mechanisms)? Have there been successful uses of international and regional instruments and what opportunities exist to go further? What strategies have been most effective in attaining the desired legal and policy changes (e.g. awareness raising, training of the judiciary and parliamentarians, NGO lobbying, etc.)

4) What are the existing services for victims of VAW and what contribution has civil society and state organizations made toward improving these services? What kind of access to these services do women (rural/urban, different ethnic groups and socio-economic classes) have?

5) What are the gaps in existing state policies and programmes?

6) To identify strategies, focuses and alliances that have contributed to progress in the area of VAW – which could guide the development of a national action plan.

Output

Product a report of not more than 40 pages, including the following:

i) Background to the issue, including an outline of the principal international landmarks in this area (World Conferences, Conventions and other legal instruments), and a summary of the causes of VAW, particularly within the context of escalating violence.

ii) Examination of specific situations in which VAW is particularly dangerous and difficult to eradicate.

iii) Assessment of the national strategies to prevent, protect and punish gender-based violence.

iv) Analysis of the institutional changes produced in the administration of justice and social sector in relation to the prevention, services, punishment and eradication of VAW.

v) Documentation and assessment of the different strategies addressing prevention, including social communications campaigns, education sector actions, social services.

vi) Alliances build and the factors which influenced their strengthening and weakening; also depicting alliances which were never formed, as well as potential new alliances.

vii) A matrix of what the women’s movement, government, UN agencies and any other players in the sub region are prioritizing in their programmes, activities, strategies and investments; and what key materials they are producing.

ix) Identify gaps which need to be addressed.

x) Recommendations and guidelines for the development of a national action plan, including identification of components of an integrated multi-disciplinary and cross sectoral approach.

Series of annexes containing the following:

- list of resources and capacities for dealing with specific situations of VAW that place women in vulnerable positions;
- list of major legal and policy changes at national and regional levels re: ending VAW since Beijing;
- list of major agreements/conventions signed (e.g. Belem Do Para, CEDAW);
- list of laws, policies, regional agreements and international conventions to end VAW – and the dates on which these were passed – on a country-by-country basis;
- country specific bibliography.

The report should include both qualitative data and quantitative data where available and relevant.

**Methodology**

The assessment will rely primarily on three methods.

1) Document review: This includes a review of all available publications on violence against women in the region, including project reports, evaluations, qualitative and quantitative research reports, and policy briefs.

2) Semi-structured interviews with key informants: This may include government authorities; women’s institutes, international donors and UN agencies; researchers and experts on violence against women; women’s rights activists and leaders of civil society organizations that address women’s rights and violence against women; and women’s crisis centres and shelters. Survivors who have accessed or tried to access the criminal justice system or other services may also be contacted for in-depth interviews.

3) Focus group discussions, using participatory techniques. The types of questions that the evaluation will attempt to answer through these focus groups are:

   - What are the major challenges that providers and project managers face in addressing the needs of women, and how do they address them?

   - What kinds of services do survivors of violence have access to, and what kinds of support do they find more, and least, useful?

**Duration:** The consultancy is expected to last 15-20 days.