

Chapter 17

Central Registry on Domestic Violence, Trinidad and Tobago

17.1 Context

The World Bank 2012 data categorises Trinidad and Tobago as a high-income developing nation (UNDAF 2013). The status of women in Trinidad and Tobago compares favourably with many middle-income developing nations. The constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women. The country has achieved universal primary education and gender parity in primary and secondary education, and has provision for free pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education for all citizens (OHCHR 2011). The government is committed to the elimination of gender disparity and discrimination, and has been guided in this by several national and international mandates.¹

Although women have made advances in breaking many barriers to employment, there still exists a gender bias that confines women to nurturing and homemaking occupations. Furthermore, domestic violence remains a significant problem, creating an adverse impact on communities, families and children, as well as on the sexual and reproductive health rights of women (UNDAF 2013). In spite of relatively strong legal frameworks and anecdotal evidence indicating the prevalence of GBV more broadly, several challenges persist in addressing this issue, including limited national data on the nature and scope of GBV (UNDAF 2013).

Provisional figures from the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service indicate that for the period 1 January 2004 to 28 February 2014, 15,312 reports of domestic violence were received. Offences ranged from psychological abuse to murder. ‘Assault by beating’ and ‘threats’ constituted the greatest number of reports, 7,404 and 4,871 respectively (MPSD 2014). On average over the last ten years, there were between 17 and 35 cases a year – depending on the year – in which a woman was killed linked to situations of domestic violence (International Inner Wheel 2012).

The real extent to which domestic violence is perpetrated is unknown due to the fragmented nature of data collection and collation, and the unavailability of sex-segregated data. Despite the overwhelming indicative statistics, Trinidad and Tobago has limited national data on the prevalence and nature of, and responses to, GBV; instead it relies heavily on international studies, sources and police databases (UNDAF 2013).

17.2 Key institutional actors

In Trinidad and Tobago, several groups are responsible for collecting data on GBV (including domestic violence). These include, inter alia, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-SAVE, the police service, the judiciary, national family services and NGOs. To respond appropriately to the issue of domestic violence, sex-disaggregated data

needs to be collected, managed and stored in retrievable formats and further refined to provide descriptions and allow for monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, the data ought to provide some basis to evaluate attributes related to situational experiences. The establishment of the Central Registry on Domestic Violence in the country was felt to provide the potential for addressing issues of data collection and assist in initiatives to respond to the scourge of domestic violence:

In the past, attempts to establish a coherent policy framework for programmes for the victims of domestic violence and their families were often frustrated by the fragmented nature of data collection and collation in Trinidad and Tobago.

(McDonald cited in Daily Express 2011)

The Gender Affairs Division (GAD) of the Ministry of Gender Youth and Child Development is the national focal point for gender and development. The division works collaboratively with state agencies, academia and civil society to promote an active and visible policy to mainstream gender perspectives in policies, programmes and projects, and was responsible for pilot testing the Central Registry on Domestic Violence (GAD 2014).

In September 2008, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development (then the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs) contracted the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies, to conduct a pilot project regarding the establishment of a central registry. An Advisory Committee was constituted in July 2009, with responsibility for guiding and monitoring progress of the registry. The membership of the Advisory Committee comprised representatives from: the GAD; the National Domestic Violence Hotline of the Domestic Violence Unit; the Ministry of Planning and Development – Central Statistical Office; the Office of the Attorney General; the Ministry of Social Development; the Ministry of Health; the Offices of the United Nations System in Trinidad and Tobago – the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); and SALISES.

Several government organisations, NGOs and women's shelters came together to pool data for the establishment of a central registry: the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs; the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-SAVE; Trinidad and Tobago Police Service – CAPA; the Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago; Coalition against Domestic Violence; Families in Action; Madinah House; and Halfway House.

17.3 Theory of change

The development of a Central Registry on Domestic Violence was considered necessary to address the issue of fragmented data collection and the lack of co-ordinated initiatives around violence against women. The availability of exact data on domestic violence was expected to:

- Identify groups at risk and promote a greater understanding of the extent, causes and consequences of, and the mechanisms necessary to reduce, violence against women.
- Inform policy development, institutional arrangements, programme design and strategies for effective public education and behaviour change.
- Assist in obtaining profiles of victims.
- Monitor the effectiveness of violence prevention and intervention activities.

17.4 Social institutions and discriminatory norms

Women's access to resources and opportunities: The initiative creates an information resource accessible by government and NGOs, and plays a vital role in the formulation of policies to tackle the issue of domestic violence. One of the objectives is to develop interventions and programmes based on the data, which would help create access to certain services and initiatives such as counselling, initiating legal proceedings and offering protection to victims.

Informal cultural norms and exclusionary practices: The key objective of the Central Registry is to reduce the incidents of domestic violence (Clarke 2001), thus it aims to bring about a change in the current culture of violence against women.

Women's and men's consciousness: It was noticed during the pilot project that police officers were more proactive in terms of the treatment of domestic violence as a criminal matter.

Formal laws, policies and accountability: As mentioned earlier, Trinidad and Tobago has some strong legal frameworks for addressing the rights of women, including the Sexual Offences Bill and Domestic Violence Act, which were passed in parliament during the 1990s (Clarke 2001), and laws such as the Equal Opportunity (Amendment) Act 2001, which grants women and men equal rights in all spheres of public and private life, inclusive of labour and employment.

17.5 Strategies

A pilot project to establish the Central Registry for Domestic Violence came into being as a result of a policy roundtable held in 1999, which took into account the increase in the number of cases of domestic violence reported to the police and other agencies, balanced against the problem of 'multiple counting', as victims of violence access services provided by different state organisations and NGOs. The project arose out of the need for co-ordination of data collection on domestic violence among all relevant agencies, and in July 1999 a Task Force to Develop a Comprehensive Nation Policy on Domestic Violence came into effect, with cabinet approval.

The key objectives of the pilot project were to:

- Develop a monitoring and surveillance system for the collection, analysis and dissemination of reliable data on domestic violence.
- Determine a minimum core set of items for inclusion in data collection instruments for the proposed central registry.

- Develop data collection protocols for the proposed registry.
- Identify and build a registry of agencies that collect data pertaining to domestic violence, and assign unique identifiers to such agencies.

A Central Registry on Domestic Violence would enable policy-makers and stakeholders to:

- Create a profile of victims and accused persons.
- Understand the frequency and incidences of domestic violence.
- Identify groups/sections of the population who are most at risk.
- Develop interventions programmes.
- Monitor the effectiveness of violence prevention and intervention strategies.

The project was initiated with a desk review of available data on similar projects, existing laws and policies, official crime statistics and existing tools for data collection. In addition, a literature review was carried out to formulate a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence issues.

The Central Registry has provisions for the use of codes that can be assigned to identify various agencies providing services to victims of domestic violence. This feature was expected to assist in quantifying the economic cost of violence against women to the healthcare system, criminal justice system, social sector, employers and families. It would also allow co-ordination between institutions for women/gender and public entities that provide services to victims of violence (Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs 2010).

17.6 Outcomes to date

The pilot project commenced and the final report on this pilot was submitted in 2011. The pilot Central Registry on Domestic Violence was considered to be a success, and it is expected it will be formally established in the near future (CEDAW 2015). The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development is in the process of establishing both a Central Registry on Domestic Violence and a Children's Registry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Some of the key outcomes of the pilot project are as follows:

- Police officers have been increasingly proactive with respect to the treatment of domestic violence as a criminal matter.
- The pilot study established a platform for training and remedial action.
- A simplified and abridged data-capture protocol has been established to permit data collection.

The pilot registry has provided significant insights into the process/mechanism for setting up the system and the possible scale at which it could operate in the initial stages, as well as the data that would help in initiating appropriate interventions

and services for both victims and offenders. It has also provided insights for service providers, such as health care and law enforcement agencies.

As stated by the Attorney General, Brigid Anisette-George, such a registry 'will give teeth to existing legislation', and 'prevention and research are two critical elements to mitigate social problems and this exercise encompasses both facets towards the eradication of the prevalence of domestic violence' (Trinidad Express 2011).

17.7 Lesson learned and the way forward

Given that this was a pilot phase, a number of challenges were identified and lessons learned that would impact full implementation of a Central Registry:

Importance of a pilot project: A Central Registry is possible, but only on a small scale in the initial stages. The pilot project made it possible to test a data collection protocol based on a small number of core data items. A protocol, on its own, will not remedy the data collection crisis. However, it is a vital first step in any effort to ensure that various sectors are collecting the data, which will subsequently have to be fed into a national database for processing and analysis.

Unavailability of data: The availability of data is hampered by the premium placed on the preservation of confidentiality by health authorities and the judicial system. A further problem is that micro-level data is difficult or impossible to obtain.

Threats to data quality: There are challenges due to the recording and classification of data, the capabilities of the persons recording observations, and the training they possess.

Limited human resource capability and importance of training: Agencies responsible for the production of statistical data on domestic violence lack exposure to training in a range of substantive domains, including research methodology, preparation of statistical data for analysis, formal techniques of statistical analysis, use of statistical software, management of statistical data files, and presentation and reporting of findings based on statistical analysis. The pilot study used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) as the principal statistical platform for managing, analysing and storing the statistical data. This is important in so far as it reinforces the significance of training in data collection and data preparation among staff from agencies recording cases of domestic violence.

As mentioned above, it is expected that the Central Registry will be formally set up in the near future to gather, collate and analyse data on domestic violence, and provide the basis for formulation of policy and programmes aimed at addressing this issue (CEDAW 2015). A draft National Gender and Development Policy, which will provide a framework for promoting gender equality, was submitted to the cabinet in 2012 for approval (Freedom House 2013). The Central Registry would complement this policy, providing the tools necessary to properly address gender inequality with respect to violence against women.

Note

- 1 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); CIM Plan of Action; Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; Commonwealth Plan of Action; United Nations Millennium Development Goals; Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, 'Convention of Belém do Pará'. See: Organization of American States (2012), *Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), National Report: Trinidad and Tobago*, available at: www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/Trinidad&Tobago2012.doc (accessed on 18 April 2015).

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