

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN THE CARIBBEAN

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Introduction

The family has been described as the cornerstone of society. It is the basic unit of social organization, and it is extremely difficult to conceive how human society could function without this institution. In fact, anthropological studies have indicated that the family has existed in every known society. George Peter Murdock, for example, in a study entitled "Social Structure," took a sample of 250 societies ranging from small hunting and gathering bands to large scale industrial societies, and concluded, based on the evidence gathered, that the family is universal.

While recognizing that there are variations in family structure from one society to another, there are significant similarities in respect of roles and functions. The family has traditionally had a number of responsibilities placed upon it, primarily connected with its role in the preparation of children for adulthood. The family is where society's new recruits first learn the basic values and norms of the culture of the society they will grow up in. It is in the family that children first learn the difference between what is seen as right or wrong, good and bad behavior, the norms governing gender roles, and the acceptance of parental and other adult authority. The family and kinship network plays the major role in maintaining and caring for dependent children—housing, clothing, and feeding them. The family not only provides most of the help and care for the young, but also the old, the sick, and other vulnerable members.

Before industrialization, the family was a unit of production. This meant that the family home was also the workplace, and that the family produced most of the goods necessary for its own survival. Children then learned the skills needed for working life from their parents. Since the early nineteenth century, work has been mainly based in factories and offices, not at home. Families do not generally produce the goods they need anymore; they go out and buy them. The skills required for adult working life are, therefore, no longer learned in the family, but at places of work, colleges, or training schools. Changes such as these, which have occurred in the family's functions, have not diminished its importance in society today. The family into which a child is born is still one of the single most important factors affecting life chances in areas such as health, education, and job opportunities.

Talcott Parsons, in his analysis of modern American society, puts forward the view that even where some functions

performed by the family are being undertaken by other institutions, there are two basic and irreducible functions which remain in the domain of the family; namely, primary socialization and stabilization of the adult personality. The United Nation's General Assembly in proclaiming 1994 as the "International Year of the Family" (IYF) with the theme "Building the smallest democracy at the heart of society," gave recognition to both the tremendous potential and needs of the family in the process of societal development.

The International Year of the Family focused worldwide attention on the family, reinforced through specific references to the importance of the family in UN Conferences of the 1990s, such as the World Social Summit. In Jamaica, as in the wider Caribbean community, it served to heighten the consciousness of the population to the importance of the family, and promoted increased coordination among the agencies involved in family-related activities. It also facilitated renewed emphasis on policies and programs directed at strengthening the family as part of national development strategies. Of particular significance was the public education campaign aimed at highlighting the role of the family as the basic unit of society responsible for the social and economic well being of its members, notably vulnerable groups such as children, the disabled, and the elderly. The campaign promoted positive values in families and support for families by communities and institutions. The Second World Congress on the Family, convened in Geneva in November 1999, was another milestone in directing global attention to family related issues.

Origins and Structure of the Caribbean Family

Caribbean family life presents a number of equally important academic and practical problems, which are also applicable to African American families in the United States. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Franklyn Frazier and Melville Herskovits entered into an inconclusive debate concerning the relative influences of African cultural persistence and New World Slavery and post-*bellum* socioeconomic contexts on the determination and distribution of family forms among blacks in the U.S. and the Caribbean.

This debate was essentially directed at problems of social causation and historical derivation. Both Herskovits and Frazier were of the view that the black family in the U.S. and the Caribbean was characterized by instability, high rates of illegitimacy, and maternal households consisting of women and their children. Herskovits argued that these organizational patterns were of African derivation and that they were

effects or correlates of practices through which old world polygamy had been modified and reinterpreted by institutionalized serial mating. Frazier countered this argument by assembling large bodies of data on social history and the situation of blacks in the U.S., to demonstrate the influence of differing social and economic contexts on their mating and family patterns. It was shown, for example, that among black professionals and propertied families in northern cities of the United States, marriage is the normal basis of family life and illegitimacy is very rare. Conversely, among southern rural immigrants in these cities, maternal families and illegitimacy were common, while marriage rates were relatively low.

Most subsequent studies of black families in the new world have adopted Frazier's orientation and hypothesis rather than that of Herskovits. Therefore, T.S. Simey and Fernando Henriques, in their research of West Indian family organization, reiterate Frazier's thesis that the social and economic conditions of slavery precluded development of stable nuclear families among blacks in the new world. Both also emphasised that the continuing "disorganization" of West Indian family life demonstrated, in high incidence of conjugal turnover, illegitimacy, and maternal households, the continuing situation of the West Indian blacks as an economically and socially depressed class. It was, however, recognized that there is significant social acceptance of these family patterns.

Orlando Patterson, in his book *The Sociology of Slavery*, pointed to the fact that in Jamaica and also the rest of the Caribbean, marriage as a social institution, in respect to both its European and African forms, broke down under slavery. In his words:

Slavery in Jamaica led to the breakdown of all forms of social sanctions relating to sexual behaviour, and with this, to the institution of marriage both in its African and European forms. . . . This breakdown of sexual mores and the institution of marriage among the Negroes occurred all over the New World. . . . The reason for this is to be found largely in the similar breakdown of such mores among the dominant white groups. . . . The scarcity of white women and the absence of moral sanctions led to a ruthless exploitation of the female slave. . . . Quite apart from exploitation by the whites, the sex-ratio of the slave population would inevitably have led to promiscuity.

Patterson concedes that within this "seeming chaos," a pattern of mating and sexual behaviour could be discerned. This he identified as falling into five basic types of associations: prostitution, unstable unions, stable unions, multiple associations, and monogamous associations, which were sometimes made legal. Based on his account, prostitution, in the strict sense of the word, was widespread, particularly in the towns where many white men, having no authority over slave

women (clerks, sailors, soldiers, artisans, etc.) were obliged to satisfy their sexual needs in this manner; unstable unions, most common among young adults, were formed "without ceremony and dissolved without romance"; stable unions and multiple associations were interrelated in that the former normally existed within the framework of the latter.

Prevalent among the older and more prosperous male slaves (boilers, coopers, smiths, other skilled mechanics, headmen, etc.), this involved the establishment of a stable relationship with one woman in conjunction with a series of loose relationships with other "wives" who were not only changed frequently, but were permitted to have other lovers. This was described as a combination of quasi-polygamy, which greatly shocked contemporary observers. There also were stable monogamous unions and legal marriages. The attitude of the slaves toward stable monogamous unions and legal marriage (the latter only becoming possible for the slave in the nineteenth century when the laws permitted it) was said to have varied over the life span. Young slaves generally ridiculed the idea of stable unions, while older slaves, even before the possibility of legal marriages in the nineteenth century, frequently settled down in stable monogamous unions.

Patterson further points out that these different patterns were not distinct categories, but more correctly, phases in the development of the mating habits of the Creole slaves over their life span. He also referred to the fact that many women also experienced another phase in family structure, which could be described as matriarchal:

Often this matriarchal phase was brought about by the death of the "husband." But even where the final "husband" was present, his authority dwindled beside the influence of his "wife" in their household. This was due to the fact that none of the children in their household would have been his own since his union with his last "wife" begun after her child-bearing period, and his own children would be living with their mothers (his former wives) often on another estate. The old women, on the other hand, would command all the respect with which children treated their mother.

Other historical and contemporary studies of the Caribbean family have all pointed to the diversity of forms which exist. T.S. Simey (1946) classified the four principal family types to be found in the Caribbean as follows: 1) Christian families, defined as patriarchal units based on legal marriage; 2) Faithful concubinage, also patriarchal but without legal sanction; 3) "Companionate" unions or consensual cohabitation of less than three years' duration; and 4) "Disintegrate" families, consisting of women with their children or grandchildren.

Fernando Henriques (1953) in his typology of the West Indian family renamed the disintegrate family as the "mater-

nal" or "grandmother" family and the "companionate" as the "keeper" family or union. Edith Clarke (1970, 1957) in her famous work *My Mother Who Fathered Me* identified marriage and concubinage as two distinct family forms and also highlighted the existence of a third type consisting of a woman with her children or grandchildren which she labeled as "denuded." Subsequent studies have also given explicit attention to extra residential mating as a widespread institutional pattern. The classification of West Indian forms most commonly applied today makes reference to three major statuses, married, common-law, and visiting unions (extra residential mating).

Impact of Social Class and Ethnicity on Family Structure

It is a generally recognized fact that the upper and middle classes in the Caribbean generally adopt the western nuclear-type family structure based on legal marriage, whereas common-law and visiting unions dominate the lower socioeconomic groups. Ethnic origin is also recognized as more influential as persons of East Indian and Chinese descent tend to have an extended family system, which is patriarchal and based on legal marriage.

As argued by Orlando Patterson, social class distinctions in respect of family patterns had its genesis in slavery. He cited an account of a young slave mechanic who was ridiculed for getting married:

Bickell recalls the case of a young mechanic who wished to get married but "who had been much laughed and scoffed at by many in the town." After the ceremony "the rabble followed, shouting and jeering as if the newly married pair had committed some dreadful crime." Paradoxically, one of the main reasons for the overt contempt shown to the slave . . . was the high status associated with legal marriage on the part of the slaves themselves, who "regard the marriage-tie with a reverence and respect approaching the superstition." Because marriage was so rare in the island and because it was practiced mainly by the wealthy proprietors, it inevitably became associated with the privileged, and one can well understand why the slave would jeer at one of his fellows partaking this high caste ceremony. Marriage was "out of the question" even for subordinate whites and . . . rank and privilege, which are strongly marked in everything, seem to turn marriage into a distinction somewhat of the nature of nobility and to reserve it in general for the proprietors and leading men of the country.

Clarke (1970,1957) also highlighted the significance of socioeconomic determinants in family patterns, particularly as it related to marriage. Her study was undertaken in three Jamaican communities, which she fictitiously named Sugartown, Mocca, and Orange Grove. Life in Sugartown was dominated by the sugar industry, which formed the eco-

nomie base of the community. Population size, geographical size, geographical mobility, and economic well being all fluctuated with the seasonality of sugar. Family and mating patterns were described as brittle and unstable.

Mocca was a small, mixed farming community, in which members survived in poverty year round. Most of the villagers could, however, trace ancestral roots back for many generations and kinship solidarity was strong as "family and kindred cling together, united in the struggle to find a means of livelihood."

Orange Grove was a more prosperous village of citrus farmers in which income was relatively high and steady. Economic activity in Mocca and Orange Grove, in contrast to Sugartown, was based on the household group and entailed "constant intimate cooperation."

In Orange Grove, marriage was clearly the preferred form of conjugal unions, with the proportion of married couples amounting to 75 percent. Corresponding figures for Mocca and Sugartown were 35 and 26 percent, respectively. Clarke attributed these differences in rates to economic conditions, social status, and the stability of the relationships, each of which was perceived as a function of community organization. As she explained:

Marriage cannot be considered at all unless the conditions proper to it are fulfilled or appear capable of fulfillment. And some of these conditions place marriage beyond the reach of large numbers of the population, while others make it necessary to postpone marriage until after a preliminary period of cohabitation (Clarke 1970 (1957), 1978).

Economic preconditions were considered to be of paramount importance. "It is not considered correct for a man to propose marriage unless he owns a house and, preferably, a bit of land." "A man should not marry and live in a rented house." The cost of the wedding itself, with extravagant expenditure on clothes, finery, and food for the wedding feast, often exhausts all the man's savings. But what is more significant is that he is expected to support his wife in a higher status than that which is accepted for a concubine. Concubinage is recognized as a partnership in which there is equal responsibility between both parties in practical affairs. It is considered right and proper for the woman to do any form of work to assist in the maintenance of the home. Marriage, however, is expected to bring about a change of life, to release the woman from the anxiety and drudgery of earning her living, to transform her "from a common woman to a lady. . . ." (Clarke).

Fernando Henriques (1953) in his work entitled *Family and Colour in Jamaica*, also highlighted similar attitudes and expectations in respect of marriage. In present-day Caribbean society, many of these attitudes still prevail, but are less rigidly adhered to.

East Indian Family Patterns

East Indians arrived in the Caribbean in large numbers as indentured or contract laborers in the post-emancipation period, to fill the labor gap on the plantations in the wake of the exodus by ex-slaves. Their family patterns (particularly in Trinidad and Guyana where they are mainly concentrated) stand in stark contrast to that of the Afro-Caribbean people just described. The family as an institution and the close and enduring family bonds are at the center of East Indian culture. The conjugal union is the focal point of the family, and marriage is the norm for all East Indians. It is generally the first relationship entered into and is arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. Important to these arrangements are caste endogamy and the dowry system. Marriage takes place at a relatively young age and is expected to last for one's lifetime. Divorce is prohibited and visiting unions are negatively sanctioned and are relatively rare. Notwithstanding, these traditional ideals of family and marriage have undergone marked changes within the cultural, social, and economic circumstances of the Caribbean.

The conditions of indentureship led to some lapses in Indian cultural traditions concerning marriage and the family in much the same way that African slaves were affected. In addition, traditional Hindu and Muslim marriages were not accorded legal sanction in Trinidad and Guyana for nearly one hundred years after the initial arrival of East Indians.

The caste system and caste endogamy among Hindus suffered demise during the indentureship period. With the shortage of Indian women and living conditions which violated caste rituals, such as restrictions on eating with members of the other castes or with non-Hindus, the system became impossible to maintain. In addition, the tendency to choose marriage partners among men offering the opportunity of socioeconomic mobility did not necessarily coincide with higher caste.

Toward the eve of indentureship, a process of reconstruction of Indian marriage and family norms began, and the achievement of independence by India in 1947 served as a catalyst for the revival of Indian culture. In addition, traditional Muslim and Hindu marriages were officially recognized, for example, in Trinidad by 1936 and 1946, respectively. In spite of the cultural revival, Indian culture was not immune from the social and cultural influences of the Caribbean. This is evident in areas such as the discontinuation of child marriages and the general decline in arranged marriages. Rauf, in his study of cultural change and ethnic identity in a Guyanese village, illustrates the transition to a free choice of marriage partners:

Whereas the older generally still see merit in the old practice of arranged marriage and support it on the grounds that arranged marriages are part of East Indian tradition and that it provides more security, the younger generally tend to emphasize that love is the main principle on which

the life partnership should rest and the family should be developed. . . . (81).

Nevadomsky (1982) reported similar trends in the rural village of Amity in Trinidad, "Arranged marriages used to be the norm. Today, most marriages are based on free personal choice." In the village, 66 percent of the married women under thirty-five years of age chose their own spouse in contrast to only 17 percent of the married women over thirty-five. Personal choice is to be expected where emphasis is placed on the affective bond between spouses, and young people have considerable freedom of movement in and out of the community (Nevadomsky).

It should be noted, as observed by both researchers, that in practice young partners seek parental approval, which is generally given except where the potential spouse is of a different race or ethnicity. Where the parental approval is not given, the trend is to go ahead with the marriage and then await reconciliation. However, such conflict is not always easily resolved and there have been reported cases of suicide, particularly among young women (Singh).

Correlating with the decline in arranged marriages is the increased age at marriage for the East Indian in the Caribbean. While marriage remains the most popular conjugal type for this group, survey data indicate the common-law unions have become more prevalent.

Position of the Church on Common-Law Unions

For many decades, since the time of slavery to the present, there has been conflict between religious doctrine and practice and Caribbean family patterns. This issue has preoccupied the clergy, missionaries, and sociologists alike. Controversy has centered largely around the nonacceptance of common-law unions by the church, where only legal marriages are regarded as morally valid sexual unions. Marriage is perceived as a permanent relationship and the only proper context for the reproduction and socialization of children within the Christian faith. Accordingly, for the church, common-law unions are not marriages. Their establishment is not publicly and ceremoniously acknowledged and the rights and duties of the couple are not specified and binding, especially as regards fidelity. Common-law unions are, therefore, viewed by the church as a form of living in sin. The involvement of persons in these unions is seen as constituting "a conscious and deliberate rebellion against the divine order" (Dundas). Problems normally arise when individuals who live in common-law unions express a desire to become converted Christians and accepted into church membership through baptism. In most instances, this is due to the reluctance of the male partner to formalize the union into a legal marriage.

The following case-study from M.G. Pantan, "The Church and the Common-Law Unions," highlights the plight of women involved in such situations.

Liz and Ranny shared a common-law union for about thirty years, and both were in their mid-fifties. The union produced five children and a grandchild, all of whom lived in a small two-apartment house. Liz was a regular visitor to the local Baptist church, but Ranny never attended church. Liz eventually decided to become a Christian, to be baptized, and to assume membership in the church. When she was mentioned to the officers for baptism, they decided that before she could be admitted for baptism she should become legally married. The Pastor met with her and Ranny and discussed the question of marriage. Ranny insisted that he loved Liz, and was happy with her, but for several reasons he was unable to legalize their union. The efforts to persuade him were unsuccessful. On the basis of this, therefore, Liz was refused baptism by the church. She continued in the church, however, as a consistent visitor. On several occasions she wept through the worship service. She complained that she needed to get married in order that she might be baptized and be able to enjoy the privileges of church membership. Ranny, however, refused to legalize the union. Liz's experience is a typical example of the dissatisfaction and discontent, which quietly plague the lives of the great majority of the women who share common-law unions (Panton).

The policy of the church in these circumstances is to counsel the couple and assist them in arrangements for the marriage, and then admit them into full church membership. However, success is not always achieved in this task. In recent time, some members of the clergy have challenged the traditional positions of the church on common-law unions.

Leon Dundas (1990) proposed that a distinction should be made between "purposive unions" defined as "common-law unions that are entered into deliberately and selectively with the hope that the union would be permanent" and "casual concubinage," that is, "common-law unions that are established fortuitously and are exploitative of unstable situations." The former, according to Dundas, should be viewed by the church as moral, the latter as immoral. Based on this distinction, Dundas recommended that the church shift attention from legal prescriptions to the nature of the marital relationship. He cited evidence from Caribbean anthropology and sociology and asserted that many common-law relationships are like those of marriage in terms of the feelings, rights, and duties of spouses and the provision of a firm foundation for good family life.

V. G. Panton's work previously cited reflects generally the same position. He argues that during slavery, the emphasis of Christian missionary activity was on baptism, and that even after the passage of laws making marriage widely accessible, it was still considered by the clergy to be a privilege for the few. This, he purports, meant that from the perspective of the church, "marriage was very broadly defined to cover all co-

residential, stable unions which promised monogamy and fidelity." In his view, it was only later that the morality of unions became tied to their legality.

Panton also distinguished between faithful concubinage and what he termed "shack up relationships." He states:

Common-law union should not be viewed as an immoral and irresponsible family pattern as it is generally conceived by the church in Jamaica. It was not produced, it did not develop, and it is not being sustained in a vacuum. Instead, it may be thought of as a social institution, which is rooted in, and has developed from, concrete historical realities. At present, it is being sustained by contemporary factors, which are no less real than the historical ones. These factors, themselves, are the result of motives, emotions, and values that are institutionalized in the present culture. Common-law union, therefore, as an integral component of the Jamaican culture, must be viewed as representing the Jamaican peasants equivalence of marriage, except that it has been denied the legal protection, which is provided in a Legal Union. (Panton).

The controversy rages, with voices such as Dundas and Panton being in the minority. Legal marriage is still regarded by the Caribbean people, both rich and poor, as the ideal family form. Many persons in common-law unions, particularly women, long for the respectability of a legal marriage and the discontinuation of "living in sin." Acceptance of common-law unions by the church would present grave moral and practical difficulties even within the context of the distinction made by Panton and Dundas in respect of casual and faithful concubinage. For example, how would one then define premarital sex, which is strictly forbidden by Christian standards; how would dissolution of common-law unions be treated in respect of the church's teachings on divorce? Should not the position of the church be consistent with the teaching of the Bible where there are clear ceremonial rites associated with marriage? There are no easy answers to those and other critical questions. The church, while continuing to provide counseling and guidance to persons living in common-law unions, must maintain its standards and convictions.

A positive development is that current statistics for Jamaica indicate that there is a steady increase in marriages both in absolute and relative terms. Divorce rates also show a rising trend, but at a lower rate than marriages (see Tables 2 and 3, p. 66).

Major Issues of Concern in the Caribbean Family

Matrifocality and male marginality

Matrifocality and male marginality are among the recurring themes in the analysis of the Caribbean family. Connected to this is the issue of single parenting. For the Caribbean as a whole, more than a third of the households

TABLE 1
REGISTERED MARRIAGES
1985-1999

YEAR	RATES PER 1,000 REGISTERED MARRIAGES	MEAN POPULATION
1985	11,776	5.1
1986	10,721	4.6
1987	10,536	4.5
1988	10,429	4.4
1989	11,145	4.7
1990	13,037	5.4
1991	13,254	5.5
1992	13,042	5.3
1993	14,352	5.8
1994	15,171	6.1
1995	18,015	7.2
1996	19,170	7.6
1997	21,502	8.5
1998*	24,131	9.4
1999#	26,671	10.3

* Revised # Provisional

Source: Registrar General's Department

TABLE 2
DIVORCES ABSOLUTE AND DIVORCE RATES
1985-1999

YEAR	DIVORCES GRANTED	RATE PER 100 MARRIAGES IN THE YEAR	RATE PER 10,000 MEAN POPULATION
1985	873	7.4	3.8
1986	894	8.3	3.8
1987	920	8.7	3.9
1988	863	8.3	3.7
1989	672	6.0	2.8
1990	823	6.3	3.4
1991	1413	10.7	5.8
1992	1454	11.1	5.9
1993	1439	10.0	5.8
1994	1343	8.9	5.4
1995	1332	8.1	5.4
1996	1391	7.4	5.5
1997	1266	5.9	5.0
1998	1420	6.0	5.5
1999	1131	4.2	4.4

Source: The Supreme Court

TABLE 3
DIVORCES ABSOLUTE CLASSIFIED BY GROUNDS
ON WHICH DIVORCE GRANTED 1985-1999

YEAR	TOTAL	DESERTION	CRUELTY	ADULTERY	5 YEARS	IRRETRIEVABILITY	OTHER
1985	873	310	90	25	418	-	30
1986	894	296	100	24	434	-	40
1987	920	311	75	32	479	-	23
1988	863	282	68	14	433	-	66
1989	672	206	35	11	378	18	24
1990	823	92	19	5	174	407	126
1991	1413	66	32	6	110	996	203
1992	1454	38	8	3	47	1127	231
1993	1439	17	4	1	33	1146	238
1994	1343	13	1	1	22	1074	232
1995	1332	5	1	-	8	1075	243
1996	1391	8	-	-	7	1094	282
1997	1266	2	-	-	1	1263	-
1998	1420	-	-	-	-	1420	-
1999	1131	-	-	-	-	1131	-

Represents cases filed in year but not granted within that year

Source: The Supreme Court

are female-headed, with the percentage being much higher for some territories. Within this group, there are, however, a number of variations, such as a mother bringing up her children single-handedly; a mother who has "visiting relationships" with a spouse or spouses, but who has no permanent father figure in the home; and the mother who, with her children, lives in her wider descent group, usually including their own mother and/or female relatives. The latter example

seems to represent a dependence on a consanguine family form in the absence or failure of the conjugal family form.

"Irresponsible" and "elusive" are two of the many labels attached to the Jamaican and other Caribbean men to explain their absence from the home. These negative views have not been welcome to men in general, and have been the subject of much public and private debate. In addition, they have served as a catalyst for a number of studies on the Caribbean

male. One controversial finding is that it is not that men are irresponsible but that they have been marginalized by the society. It has been clearly revealed by the research undertaken in the region that the role of father is associated in the main with economic provider. Because the economic factor is so central to the concept of fatherhood, the status of males as husbands and fathers is ultimately determined by it. The poorer and more materially deprived men are, the greater their marginality, and the greater also the role of women in the family unit. An interesting new development in recent years is the growing number of children being brought up by single fathers. There are also indications that, in general, men are becoming more involved in childcare and domestic responsibilities regarded as female chores.

Poverty and the Family

At the household level, poor families throughout the Caribbean tend to have more children and have attained lower levels of education than nonpoor households. The absence of a nuclear family structure has also been closely associated with poverty. This includes household with a single parent (usually female-headed) or households with children headed by a grandparent.

Many poor families live in overcrowded conditions lacking proper housing, sanitation facilities, and other basic services. While malnutrition is not a major problem in the Caribbean as a region, there is evidence that malnutrition rates among children in some poor households can be quite high. Low quality education is very often the lot of children in poor households. In many instances, this has a lasting negative impact on a child's lifetime opportunities, making it impossible to break the poverty cycle. The incidence of poverty among female-headed households is high, particularly in urban areas. This has been attributed to high unemployment, low wages, and the constraints due to child-raising activities.

A recent study on poverty in the Caribbean has shown that the family plays an important role in poverty alleviation and coping strategies. As pointed out, the extended family has historically acted as a safety net both for elderly members and for younger members entering the labor market or starting their own family. The family pools the risk of unemployment among its younger members. Social sanctions within close-knit communities have reinforced these institutions. Adult children who do not care for elderly relatives face ostracism by the wider community. For elderly persons without relatives, the community itself often provides support out of a sense of responsibility.

In Jamaica, elderly women are most likely to be living with their offspring, usually a daughter, if they are no longer living in their own house. In Dominica, it has been found that nearly half of elderly persons live with family members and a further 27 percent with their spouse only. Of note is the fact

that the likelihood of living with children is much greater for women than for men, while the majority of residents in homes for the aged are men, in spite of women's longer life expectancy. This differential has sometimes been attributed to greater neglect by men of their partners and children in earlier years, resulting in their losing complete touch with family networks.

Irrespective of whether the elderly persons reside in the same household as other family members, the family remains an important source of support in old age. A study in Barbados found that more than three-quarters of elderly persons received help from their children (both cash and in-kind support). In Dominica, 37 percent of the elderly receive regular financial help from family members, although there are marked gender differences, with 47 percent of all elderly women receiving such support compared with only 20 percent of elderly men. The gender differential is reversed in respect of social security payments or pension, with 29 percent of older women and 46 percent of older men relying on such support. In Trinidad and Tobago, of persons older than sixty years, 32 percent receive income from the family and 61 percent receive income from a pension or welfare.

Recent changes in the economic, political, social, legal, and demographic environment have weakened family systems of support. These include factors such as an aging population, increasing urbanization and therefore overcrowded living conditions, and changes in the concept of familial responsibility. Family structure and its role in social support are also influenced by migration flows. Migration patterns have led to the concept of the "transnational" family. Parents frequently leave their children with grandparents to search for new opportunities, and this practice has negative as well as positive outcomes. On the one hand, older people benefit from the company of their grandchildren who provide support in their advancing old age and dependency. On the other hand, caring for one's grandchildren produces economic and social pressures, especially when financial obligations are not met by the absent adult children.

Juvenile Delinquency and Family Instability

The available evidence indicates that there is a high level of youth involvement in the increased crime rate in the Caribbean region, particularly in the urban areas. Family disruptions or instability (divorce, desertion, single-parent families, ineffective parenting) are frequently cited as being among the major factors associated with juvenile delinquency. Evidence of this is borne out in a microstudy undertaken in Grenada, which looked at the socioeconomic profile of prisoners, many of whom were juveniles as young as fifteen years of age. The majority were found to be from large, low-income families with single mothers or grandparents as the head of household. Only 18 percent were from families with both parents, whereas 67 percent were from families with single mothers and grandparents.

A high rate of school drop-out was also noted, with nearly 50 percent not completing primary school and only 18 percent attending secondary school. Comparable results have been obtained in studies of the socioeconomic characteristics of the prison population of Jamaica and other Caribbean countries.

Another factor which influences juvenile delinquency is migration. Apart from the economic effects, migration also has far-reaching social effects. A negative impact of migration is the splitting up of families when one or more of its members migrate. In many cases one person in the household, often a parent and spouse (rather than the entire family), emigrates in the hope of eventually sending for the rest of the family. As household members leave, the family nucleus is eroded, often leaving a single parent or grandparents to care for children. The loss of one or both parents can disrupt the stability of the home environment and reduce the amount of adequate supervised care the child receives. In some cases these disruptions and lack of parental supervision can lead to vagrancy, drug abuse, alcoholism, and crime among the young.

Family Policies and Programs in the Caribbean

Legislation

Reform in legislation represents one of the major areas of focus in family policies in the Caribbean. In Jamaica in December 1975, family law committee was appointed and specifically charged "to examine the existing laws relating to divorce and other areas of the matrimonial and family law, and to make recommendation for changes where this is deemed necessary." The establishment of the family court in December 1975 was the first step toward a new approach to the subject of family law.

Jamaican law is derived from English law; it traditionally has been concerned with the marriage-based family. The social reality as previously discussed is that family is often initiated without any reference to marriage or the law. Thus, a substantial proportion of family relationships are based on informal relationships such as the common-law and visiting unions.

The disparity between the legal norm and social reality has presented a limitation on the application and effectiveness of the law. The trend toward widening the scope of law to embrace informal and non marital family relationships has also been evident in other Caribbean countries.

In this regard, major legislative reforms that have been introduced include removing legal distinction between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" children particularly in respect of inheritance rights, and the introduction of legal provisions to govern the sharing of property in the dissolution of common-law unions.

Other major legislative changes in respect of family law include removing the necessity for establishment of fault in

divorce proceedings and replacing various grounds for divorce with a single category the "irretrievable breakdown of the marriage," and broadening the legal rights of married women in respect of property ownership.

In respect of new legislation, the introduction of a "Domestic Violence Act" in Jamaica generated much interest and impassioned debate, particularly among women's rights activists.

There are currently calls for stricter enforcement of the "Child Care and Protection Act," and inclusion of harsher penalties in the laws governing rape, incest, and carnal abuse.

State and Other Family Support Systems

In Jamaica, the major institutional support system to families consist of the following:

- The Children Services Division, which operates under the provision of the Juveniles Act (1957), has responsibility for: (a) Children in need of care and protection, such as those who are abandoned, abused and neglected; (b) children who are beyond parental control; and (c) children who have committed offenses.
- The National Daycare program provides care and supervision to children up to four years old. The functions of this program are to monitor and supervise daycare centers; plan and organize training; ensure the registration of daycare facilities; promote public awareness/education programs; support income-generating projects in rural parishes; and provide supplies and equipment to daycares.
- The Child Support Unit administers a program for children in especially difficult circumstances. This program is part of the implementation of the government ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is funded by UNICEF. The components of the program are advocacy and policy development, detection and treatment of child abuse, improving the situation of street children, and community based services for children with disabilities.
- The Adoption Board, which is a statutory body established in 1957 under the Children (Adoption of) Act, processes applications for adoptions and guides the process.
- The Family Court Systems offers both judicial and social services. The Juvenile Act provides for the establishment and management of courts to deal with matter pertaining to children from birth to eighteen years. Family counseling services are also provided.
- Save The Children Fund (UK) works at an operational level in Jamaica. SCF (UK) is involved in Children's Rights Advocacy, and collaborates with the Jamaican Coalition on the Rights of the Child. It is also involved in parenting education, resource development and train-

ing, services to street and working children, and community participation.

- The National Council for the Senior Citizens is mandated to implement a plan for the elderly which promotes sense of security and belonging and encourages involvement in the national development efforts. The main activities of the council includes advocacy and policy formulation; initiation and monitoring of Golden Age Clubs which carry out income-generating projects and other community outreach programs including a feeding program and home help services; training and education of the elderly; referrals and other services.
- The Jamaica Council for the Disabled administers the government's rehabilitation and support program for persons with disabilities. Its responsibility encompasses national registration of the disabled.

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) are also participating actively in providing services to families. These include:

- Church-based family life ministries focused mainly, though not exclusively, on counseling (both pre-marital and marital)
- Women's organizations, such as Woman Incorporated, formed in 1985, undertake regular education campaigns to inform the general public about the negative impact of rape, incest, and domestic violence on the family and the community. It also assists in providing funding for women's crisis centers established to provide counseling and shelter for women who are victims of rape and domestic violence. A major program of the women's center is the continuing education for young mothers in the age range of sixteen years and under.
- Parenting associations (e.g., Parenting Coalition, Help for Parents) that are involved in teaching parenting skills.
- A men's organization (Fathers Incorporated) was formed in 1991 for fathers who are trying to change the perception that Jamaican men are irresponsible. The group's aim is to help men to become better fathers. This is done mainly through counseling and training.

Although these government and nongovernment institutions and programs just outlined have made important contributions towards providing a policy framework and support services for families, there are still a number of challenges to overcome. These include the limited availability of human and financial resources to implement programs and the need for greater integration of efforts.

A number of factors bear evidence that there are still many severe problems in the family system. These include the rising number of children in the need of care and protection, in particular, the growing numbers of street children, and the increase in domestic violence, incest, sexual abuse, and juvenile delinquency.

Relevance of the Family-specific Recommendations of the United Nations Global Conferences of the 1990s

The deliberation and outcome of the United Nations Global Conferences of the 1990s have served to highlight a long known but insufficiently recognized fact, that family is at the heart of society. The Caribbean, both at the regional and country levels, has participated fully in these conference, endorsed the various declarations, and ratified most of the respective conventions. As a region, we have recorded considerable progress in areas such as human rights, improving the status of women, increasing access to education, reducing infant and child mortality, and increasing life expectancy. In addition, we have not been faced with extreme conditions such as civil wars and famines experienced in some developing countries, which result in wide-scale devastation and social dislocations.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, we are confronted with major social and economic problems related to the unsatisfactory level of growth in the economy, the existence of wide gaps between various social groups, and the persistence of conditions of poverty among economically disadvantaged segments of the population in both urban and rural areas. The fight to alleviate poverty is one of the greatest challenges we face. It is recognized that strategies to alleviate poverty must of necessity be linked with policies to improve the conditions of low income families. Education, for example, has served as a principal vehicle for intergenerational social mobility in the Caribbean and it is therefore most critical for us that the level of primary education be constantly improved, and that there be much greater access to secondary and tertiary level education. In this regard, the limits placed by social class origin and family background on educational attainment (in particular, access to secondary and tertiary education) must be significantly reduced, if not eliminated.

Closely related to the issues of education is appropriate training to facilitate access to employment within an economic policy framework that maximizes job creation. As stated in section V (paragraph 82) of the Plan of Action for the Social Summit, "Nothing short of a renewed and massive political will at the national and international levels to invest in people and their well being will achieve the objectives of social development." As further expressed in that paragraph, "whereas social development and the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Summit are primarily the responsibility of Governments, also essential for full implementation, are international cooperation and assistance." Jamaicans and the rest of the Caribbean people accept the fact that a partnership approach involving governments, non-government organizations, international agencies, the private sector, and other actors in civil society, is critical for social development and poverty eradication. Success in this regard will contribute significantly toward the strengthening of the family as the basic unit of society.

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