Child sexual abuse: Women and human development in Caribbean islands

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Abstract: Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a silent social problem that is escalating in the Caribbean with the potential to threaten the human capabilities of women and the prospects of sustainable human development. In view of close family ties and the physical proximity of family households, the issues of complicity, silence, denial and family loyalty in Caribbean islands, incidents of CSA are allowed to perpetuate, oftentimes without intervention. This contributes to unresolved childhood trauma that threatens women’s capability to function effectively in all spheres of life. This paper explores the effects of CSA on women and seeks to illustrate how the determinants of human development such as education, health, human rights, human security and justice are threatened for women who experience CSA as it forecloses their life choices, agency and freedom to live a happier and more valuable life. The paper also examines economic growth because of its related ideas to human development as a tool for well being. The paper concludes that some children are not safe under adult protection in the home. Recommendations are made for the family to be a locus of human development and public scrutiny where the capabilities of girls are nurtured in order to secure their full potential as one of the major resources in Caribbean islands necessary for sustainable human development amidst the current global economic crisis and future uncertainties.

Keywords
Child sexual abuse, human development, human capability approach and women.

The case of Nikita

“I was 9 years old when my mother’s boyfriend began to interfere with me. At 14 years, I must have slept with more than a dozen guys all of them old enough to be my grandfather. The nurses at the health centre knew me very well as I go there with all sorts of diseases, some of them I do not know their names. HIV and AIDS must be one of them. If I met a nice looking guy, before he knew it, I would go down on him.

I was having a hard time living with myself. I felt so dirty, so useless, having sex with strangers somehow made me feel I was good for at least one thing. As an adult, one day I suddenly decided this was it. This guy tore off my shirt and my bra but couldn’t get my pants off. I escaped with several bad bruises, but I felt wonderful. It was the first time since I was 9 that I found the strength to say no to someone who wanted to interfere with me. Sometimes, when I’m sitting down all by myself, the whole nightmare comes back to haunt me.

Sometimes I lock myself in a room or sit under the house all day and cry. No one really cares, you can’t trust anyone. Sometimes I’m even afraid for myself, the thoughts that come to my head. I didn’t deserve to be treated like that. I did not finish school, I do not know who has my baby. They told me she is in foster care with some lady. I want to make someone, anyone pay for all that has happened to me. I get so moody at times. The slight thing can trigger me. Most people tell me that I am always vex and angry, they are right as do not know what it is to smile and to laugh”.

Introduction

‘People are the real wealth of a nation’ was the opening statement of the first Human Development Report in 1990 which became the guiding principle for subsequent reports. Implicit in this statement is that women are the wealth of nations. It could therefore be safe to argue that if the evolving human capabilities of girls are negatively impacted, then, there are obvious implications for the general productivity of human development of Caribbean islands. The long term effects of childhood trauma is one such negative event that has affected many girls in all spheres of life, especially when the trauma remains unresolved.
The narrative of Nikita is a vivid illustration of the long term consequences of CSA across life span. Nikita represents the voice of numerous children victims in the Caribbean islands and worldwide. A brief analysis of the case of Nikita demonstrates that her life has been turned upside down as a result of this single act of CSA at the age of 9 years followed by multiple acts of sexual coercion and sexual violence. Women who are victims of CSA often suffer a range of psychosocial problems and personal challenges. This paper attempts to examine this silent social problem within the framework of a human development perspective, utilizing Amartya Sen (1999, 2002, 2005) and Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2008, 2011) conceptualization of human development. Reference is made to other theories of human development and economic growth because of their conceptual features to development thinking and well being. In discussing the impact of CSA on women, I will also draw on my own experiences as a social worker having worked with women and children who have been victims of CSA. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity pseudo names are used.

Characteristics of CSA

CSA is one form of child maltreatment which refers to the involvement of a child in contact and non contact sexual activities for the pleasure of an adult. It occurs in a variety of contact forms and moves along a continuum of touching, kissing, fondling and sexual penetration. Non contact forms may include verbal sexual abuse, voyeurism and exhibitionism. CSA which is a criminal offence in the Caribbean islands is represented by other terminologies in the law such as incest, carnal knowledge, child prostitution, child pornography, child trafficking, unnatural offences, sexual connections, indecent sexual assault and indecent sexual exposure among others.

A 2009 study of CSA in the Eastern Caribbean carried out in six islands namely; Anguilla, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat and St Kitts and Nevis revealed three main forms of CSA. The first type is intra-familial abuse which is the most common form. It is secretive, silent, invisible and fathers and step-fathers are the main perpetrators (Jones, Jemmott, 2009:11). What is extremely disturbing about this form of sexual abuse is that it occurs in the home, mothers know about it but fail to act. The second type of abuse is non family abuse characterized by two extremes, strangers on one hand and trusted adults on the other. Notable examples of perpetrators of the latter type of abuse are teachers, coaches, pastors and priests. The third form of abuse is transactional sexual abuse. This form is sometimes referred to as opportunistic where children have sex with adults in exchange for finances and or material goods (Jones, Jemmott, 2009: 11). This form of abuse, is an open secret, parents and community have full knowledge of it, but take no action. An emerging trend in the Caribbean islands is the sexual abuse of boys, transaction sex between children, internet abuse, cell phone pornography, child sex tourism, sexual aggression by girls and opportunistic abuse linked to natural disasters (Jones & Jemmott, 2009:13).

Perpetrators and victims

Research shows that more girls than boys are sexually abused. According to The State of the World’s Children (2007), 20% of women suffered sexual abuse as children as compared to 10% - 14% for men. The studies of Finkelhor (1994) for example found females to be abused at 1.5 to 3 times the rate of males. According to the Jones & Jemmott, 2009 island study, girls of all ages were found to be at risk of inter-familial sexual abuse and it happens at any age and continues until the child lives home. In my social work practice, infants of six and nine months were allegedly reported to have been sexually abused. Meanwhile, the findings that most CSA are committed by adult men in the USA (NCANDS, 2002) were found to be true for the islands studied in the Jones & Jemmott, 2009 study. According to this report, “all the survivors had been abused by men and none by women. Fathers and step-fathers were the people most likely to commit abuse, although other men were mentioned: cousins, a grandfather, a school principal, mothers’ boyfriends and young men in the community” (Jones & Jemmott, 2009: 100).

Scale of the problem

According to the World Bank’s Caribbean Youth Development Report (2003), the Caribbean has the earliest age of sexual ‘debut’ in the world with many young people being initiated into sexual behavior as a consequence of child abuse as early as 10 years and in some cases even younger. The Caribbean Youth Health Survey 2000, reported that one in every ten children in St. Lucia is at risk of sexual abuse. Reported cases of CSA for St Lucia has been consistently the highest type of child maltreatment for the period 2007 – 2011 with reported cases ranging from 76 – 106. While this data remains disturbing, what is even more alarming is the findings from the Child Vulnerability Study, 2005 conducted in St. Lucia, Barbados and St. Vincent where children reported that one of the worst things that could happen during the life experience of a child is being sexually abused by the ‘mister’.
The situation of CSA in Aruba is also distressing whereby reported cases ranked the highest in 2009 (70 N= 291), the second highest in 2010 (52 N=258) and the third highest in 2011 (46 N=248). In the island of Curacao reported cases of CSA in one social service agency (Overzicht Casuistiek Stichting Kinderbescherming) revealed a total of 175 cases between 2004-2011. Meanwhile, a prevalence survey conducted in Trinidad and Tobago by Chadee as cited by Matroo, 2011, reveals that 87% of the respondents reported that CSA was ‘very prevalent’. But the available statistical data on CSA does not represent the real magnitude of the problem in view of gross underreporting. Under-reporting could be as a result of multiple factors, such as fear of disbelief and shame on the part of the child. Other factors may include poor interagency collaboration, absence of protocols, and limitations in centralized data base registries. In St. Lucia the underreporting situation is compounded by a system of an ‘aragema’ which means ‘arrangement’ referring to a domestic settlement of a case where the child’s parent or guardian accepts cash or goods in kind in exchange of non reporting (Eugene, 2006). Some mothers are known to have done home repairs, purchased vehicles, and go on a spending spree with finances received for the sexual misuse and abuse of their daughter’s sexuality. This frames the picture of the unfortunate price girls pay for their identity and survival.

**Human development and CSA**

There is a plethora of theories, models and definitions of development. Human development is one new way of thinking, and measuring it evolved in the 1990s with the pioneering work of Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, founder of the Human Development Reports. The goal of the Human Development Reports is to put people at the centre of the development process whereby human development is defined “as enlarging people’s choices and to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives” (Haq, 1999). The concept of human development includes various theories such as social development, sustainable development, human and social capital, basic needs approach, human rights, human security and happiness, all of which place people at the center of development.

While the perspectives of human development may be many, it is the human capability approach as inspired by Amartya Sen with contributions from Martha Nussbaum that have presented a human centered meaning to development that appear to be relevant to all countries and in many practice areas (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). According to Sen, 1999, “human development is the process of enlarging a person’s choices to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community.” Sen’s work on human capabilities and functionings influenced the work of Mahbub ul Haq, as collectively, and in collaboration with other colleagues, they developed the Human Development Index (HDI).

The purpose of the HDI was to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people centered policies (Haq, 1995). The HDI has served as a flagship for the human development approach (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). It is a comparative measure of three equally weighted components namely; (1) a long and healthy life, measured by health and life expectancy (2) literacy and knowledge, measured by education, literacy levels and school enrollment; and (3) a decent standard of living measured by wealth i.e., per capita income. The HDI based on universally valued and basic capabilities (Sen, 1999) are used to distinguish whether a country is developed, developing or under developed.

Two of the HDI indicators, health and education are directly affected by what happens in childhood. Similarly, a cursory glance at the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), designed by the international community to monitor development progress would reveal the identical findings. One can argue therefore that it is not possible to think of present and future sustainable development of small islands without addressing the many issues affecting children. Sexual abuse in childhood is one of the worst forms of child maltreatment (Child Vulnerable Study, Unicef, 2005) that has according to research adversely impact the health, education and well becoming of children into adulthood. In this regard, it would be reasonable to assume that CSA has the potential to adversely affect human development given the indicators of the HDI as one form of measuring the quality and richness of human lives.

Another distinguishing feature of human development is Nussbaum’s (2008) proposed list of ten central human capabilities that she argues should be the basis of constitutional guarantees. These include life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason affiliation, other species, play and control over one’s environment (Nussbaum, 2008). While these have some parallel to Sen’s views on capability, Sen argues “ no one list is seen as the only route towards maximizing one’s freedom to do the things that they have reason to value” (Nussbaum, 2008). As in the case of Nikita, all ten mentioned capabilities of Nussbaum (2008) were
directly affected. Nikita’s narrative demonstrates an inability to laugh and play as well as a downward spiral of depression, fear, anger, self-hate, without necessarily an end to her healing and survival. Nikita’s experience parallels the shared experiences of other women I worked with who share similar narratives and pathologies. More importantly, Nikita’s story clearly illustrates that CSA has multiple layers affecting women’s health; cognitive development; educational attainment; employment opportunities; income earning potential; dignity; pride; safety and security.

**CSA: A threat to health as a vital capability for human development**

One exceptional feature of human development is its declaration that health is a fundamental capability that facilitates achievements in various aspects of life. Sen asserts “health is among the most important conditions of human life and a critically significant constituent of human capabilities which we have reason to value” (2002:660). Epidemiological studies on sexual violence against children consistently show that it continues to be a global public health concern. The Jones and Jemmott, 2009 survey showed that over 85% of respondents believed that long term emotional harm was caused to children as a consequence of CSA. “The pioneering review of the prevalence studies of CSA from 1970 – 1990 (Finkelhor, 1994), and a similar review conducted a decade later (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009), confirm that the international epidemiology of CSA is comparably prevalent” (Yemataw, Workie, Biruk, Konrad & Harry, 2011). Studies have therefore shown that women victims of CSA suffer negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, suicidal attempts, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and substance use. Some of these symptoms were evidenced in the case of Nikita to include the contraction of sexually transmitted illnesses.

In my practice as a social worker, I encountered women who experienced CSA and still battle with feelings of hurt, pain, guilt, isolation from family and friends and were not able to participate in community activities and enjoy the good life, health and productivity in the labour force. The study of Siegel & Williams (2003) shows that women survivors of CSA made greater use of the primary medical care and would be at higher risk of premature mortality because their victimization put them at risk for behavious such as drug abuse or prostitution that could have serious adverse health consequences leading to early mortality. In some cases the lives of girls in the islands have been cut short when the sexual assault is combined with murder. In such cases, ‘life’ as one of Nussbaum’s central human capability where one is expected to be able to end a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living (Nussbaum, 2008).

The negative impact of CSA on health remains a troubling concern that underscores the need to prevent and find ways to mitigate the adverse consequences of abuse for women who have the potential capabilities to contribute to the sustainable development of small islands given health ‘s centrality to “economic growth, educational achievements, cognitive development, employment opportunities, income earning potential as well as the more amorphous aspects of dignity, safety, security and empowerment” (Ariana & Naveed in Deneulin & Shahani, 2009:229).

**CSA: A threat to education as a vital capability for human development**

Education is yet another key dimension to human development whether it is perceived from human capital theory where it is conceptualized as an investment that yields economic productivity and growth, or from a ‘human capability approach which sees education fulfilling the role of instrumental, empowering and redistributive’ (Unterhalter, 2009 in Deneulin & Shahani, 2009: 207). In Currie & Widom, a 2010 study conducted on the long term consequences of child abuse on adult economic well being, the results show that women with documented histories of sexual abuse have lower levels of education, employment, earnings and fewer assets (owning a home, bank account, vehicle), as adults compared to matched controlled children. This study also found that women victims of CSA often times suffer the consequences of reduced economic productivity due to early school drop-out, teenage pregnancy and an inability to learn due to negative mental health impact of the incident (Currie & Widom’s, 2010).

In the case of a little girl from a rural community in one of the Caribbean islands who was allegedly raped by a minibus driver, she complained of being hyper vigilant and having exaggerated startled responses ‘jumping’. She reported immediate panic attack every time she saw a minibus and heard the sound of horns and engines. She immediately quivers, squirms and cries. In that particular case, the girl was unable to attend school for almost half of the academic year. As in the case of Nikita who became pregnant and dropped out of high school, this made it difficult for her to find reasonable employment to support her child and herself. School dropout means that
girls are not able to reach their full academic potential, and as an adult runs the risk of becoming economically dependent on others, in most cases men. Under these circumstances, women become ‘helpless prey in the violation of other kinds of freedom’ (Sen 1999) such as vulnerable to low paid or unskilled jobs characterized by the absence of upward mobility and other opportunities, what Lopez-Claros, & Zahidi (2005) refer to as the ‘ghettorization of female labour’. In some Caribbean islands, as part of the basic needs and human resource programs, skills training are provided. My critique of these initiatives is that these women usually land themselves in jobs that are short term, exploitative and with low wage. This is not the way to go in order to promote the well being of women and to improve their living standards.

Furthermore, increased economic participation among vulnerable women with limited education may only bring modest benefits. It does not result in a highly remunerative career trajectory. Consequently, this form of employment for the likes of Nikita does not result to any substantial economic productivity for small islands. Yet, in other cases, women like Nikita may become permanent recipients of state welfare. Thus, the dependency of women on welfare, compounded by the ‘ghettorization of female labour’ deprives women of land and house ownership and other assets. It further affects women’s capacity to adequately socialize their children for the next generation, and of their capacity to have powerful influence in controlling their environment, and even in political participation. One can argue, that given the possibility of reduced economic productivity as a result of CSA, Nikita’s freedom, such as ‘the freedom to enjoy various functionings or to lead the kind of life she has reason to value (Sen, 1999) is likely to be adversely restricted.

Sen (1999) warns against the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation. Consequently, Sen (1999) wrote extensively about the role of basic education in economic development, stating categorically that without compulsory education no economic development is possible. Educational attainment is undoubtedly the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of life. Thus, if CSA reduces the likelihood that girls complete school and make them vulnerable to the early commencement of a family and increase health risks, these have a detrimental effect on expanding their human capabilities and agency.

Therefore, from a human development perspective, CSA is one prohibitory factor against healthy living and educational attainment that negatively affects women’s workforce participation and contribution to the national economy. As the World Economic Forum (2005) asserts “the economic participation for women and their presence in the workforce in quantitative terms is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole.”

**CSA: Impact on economic growth and human development**

There is a substantial body of theories of economic growth and development with an emphasis on the wealth of countries. Economic growth is measured by Gini coefficient, Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These measurements have been criticized for their focus on per capita income that does not console women whose human existence is characterized by violence, inequality and capability deprivation. One the contrary, one can argue that economic growth can also be seen as necessary ingredients for promoting human flourishing (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). This is important in so far as economic growth leads to expansion of valuable capabilities such as education, health care and the provision of other goods and services to promote human rights, justice, freedom and agency of women.

Deneulin & Shahani, 2009 also argue that the relationship between economic growth and human flourishing is bidirectional citing the works of Rains et al (2000). This suggests that one precondition for economic growth might be a better educated female workforce which leads to reduced fertility rates and hence higher economic growth per capita (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009) . Moreover, a higher economic growth would make the financial resources available in which to provide the employment opportunities that can then generate higher economic growth. The crux of the matter is such that some victims of CSA drop out of school and suffer with symptoms of psychopathology which affects one’s ability to function effectively in the work place, one can argue that the labour force participation of women who are victims of CSA can be threatened. This undoubtedly can compromise sustainable growth and development of small islands especially when it has been reported by the World Economic Forum Reports (2005, 2010 & 2011) and the Gender Gap Report (2010) that women make up one half of the world’s population and that gender is no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the millennium development agenda.
The labour force participation of women who experience CSA are interconnected to other areas that may serve as conduits for gender equity, equality, productivity, growth and development. For example, by virtue of women’s role as caregivers, mothers, wives, and partners, they are predominantly consumers of goods and services. Thus, there are emerging studies on the growing ‘power of the purse’ (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi, 2010:31) or ‘the rise of the sheconomy’ (Luscombe, 2010) and how this will be among the main drivers of growth in the post crisis economies. As Pine & Gnssen, 2009 claim “women make 85% of the buying decisions, or are the chief purchasing officers of their households.” “Globally, women control about $20 trillion in annual consumer spending, and that figure could climb as high as $28 trillion in the next five years. In aggregate, women represent a growth market bigger than China and India. Given these numbers, it would be foolish to ignore or underestimate the female consumer.” (Harvard Business Review, Sept. 2009).

Thus, women’s increased capacity to save as well as to spend on food, healthcare, education, childcare, household appliances, clothing and even vacations contribute to a country’s economic growth. The World Economic Forum Report, 2011 notes “we know that women spend on an average 90% of their earnings on education, health and nutrition of their families and communities while men invest only 50% of their earnings in these areas.” Therefore, one can argue that in islands where women have limited prospects to complete school, find a job and enjoy good health due to the vicissitudes of sexual violence in childhood, domestic economic growth is likely to be significantly constrained.

Given that in Aruba, Curacao and in the English speaking islands, women make up almost half of the population and the labour force, and the fact that the majority of the victims of CSA are girls, what then is the impact of CSA on national economic growth? How does this single or multiple acts of sexual violence impact the human capability of women’s functionings to enlarge their choices and to lead life that they have reason to value? Studies have shown that respondents who indicated documented histories of abuse, reported earning an average of almost US$8,000 less per year (Currie & Widom, 2010: 117). While there is no known similar data for the Caribbean, it can be assumed that a similar reduction in annual income may prevail, given the findings of Peterson’s study which reveal “despite impressive growth, Aruba’s average female economic participation still lags behind the best in the world and that 1% increase in female economic participation has a significant impact on GDP growth of +10%” (2011). Consequently, the effect of CSA appears to have detrimental implications on islands sustainable human development and economic growth.

**CSA: Human rights, human security and justice**

The ideas of human rights, human security and justice bear relevance to human development thinking as they promote freedom, well being and dignity of all people. CSA is a human rights violation as it is in direct contravention with the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), two international instruments that have been signed and ratified by the Caribbean islands. The CRC for example is written in the hope that children will be protected from all forms of maltreatment one of which is CSA. While the CRC explicitly states in article 34 that countries shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative social, and educational measures, either nationally, bilaterally or multilaterally in order to protect children from sexual abuse, yet the number of incidents have continued to rise in the Caribbean islands, thereby leading to a myriad of consequences on girls and on sustainable human and economic development.

As in the case of Nikita, CSA affects functionings such as achieving self-respect, taking part in the life of the community or appearing in public without shame. As cited in the studies of Wondie, et al, (2011), “child abuse survivors demonstrated a lower degree of social support, a lower degree of empowerment… as well as a higher degree of guilt and increased likelihood of viewing the world as dangerous …and a lower degree of self-worth and a higher degree of objective personal vulnerability compared to their non sexually abused normal control counterparts.” Under those conditions, one can reasonably assume that women’s agency and freedom to pursue and realize goals that they value and with the creativity and ability to act on behalf of their aspirations may be hampered. Similarly, one may argue that such women may lack the self-determination, authentic self-direction, autonomy, self-reliance, empowerment and voice.

CSA by virtue of being a criminal offence is synonymous to notions of justice, where as justice is one of the determinants of human development defined as “seeking to expand well-being in ways that expand equity, sustain outcomes across time, respect human rights, limit environment destruction and respect other goals of a society” (Alkire, 2010). In this regard, justice in CSA is a human rights obligation, whereby children are seen to have unalienable rights and entitlements as embodied in
the CRC. The understanding of justice in cases of CSA can also be defined as “achieving a just outcome…that wrongdoing is acknowledged, that the wrongdoers are identified and made to face the consequences of their actions and that reparation is made to society and the person who has suffered harm” (Smith and Woodhed, 1998 as cited in Green 2006).

The ideas of security had been for a long time related to activities of law enforcement, the police and the military. The 1994 Human Development Report shifted the focus of security from the protection of the state and its borders by military means to the protection of individuals from a wider range of threats to their well being (Deneulini, 2009:62). CSA is a violent act that threatens human security since it presents a risk to human survival and safety.

In instances where the perpetrator denies the allegations of CSA this affects the child’s human security and subsequently her ability to recover as she lives a life of guilt or self-blame. A good example can be found from my past experiences where children constantly remarked: “if only he would admit that he interfered with me, I would feel so much better”. On the other hand, where the alleged perpetrator is brought to justice, the victim feels vindicated and this experience aids in the healing process and builds resiliency, thereby giving children greater chances to enhance life opportunities. For women this is “development as freedom experience” (Sen, 1999). In a more practical sense, where the perpetrator is incarcerated the children feel their world is much safer and a real sense of safety and security. While in other cases, this same child may become vulnerable to future abuse within the family, thereby continuously endangering her safety and security. In a therapy session with an adolescent girl, Maya, confesses:

“I was abused by uncle who is now in prison, I felt safer when once he was no longer in my sight. But then my brother began having sex with me…so I said, I prefer to have sex with any other man but not my brother, so I ask an old man to be my friend and this is how he raped me one day.. I did not want the matter to go to court, because I was the one who asked him to be friends.”

The notion of justice within CSA is undoubtedly fraught with challenges. For example, interfacing with the medical, the police and legal justice systems and the way children are treated by social service agencies and residential homes may at times result in further revictimization. On the other hand, children can be stereotyped, stigmatized as liars and reconstructed as asexual, spoiled goods and as no longer children within the community. Sen’s (1999) and Nussbaum’s (2008) notions of justice as human rights, freedom and liberation are applicable here, whereby children are not accorded respect, dignity and the community support which would assist in prevention and intervention for optimum human functioning in adulthood.

Meanwhile, some adolescent victims of CSA engage in a pattern of running away from home. In fact, running away is a strong indication that there is something terribly wrong in the home. Others may turn to a life of juvenile delinquency marked by stealing, housebreaking, damage to property, assault, threats involvement with gangs and the possession of weapons and drugs as evidenced by my social work experience. Parents informed me of their daughters who slept with knives under their pillow with the intention of hurting their abuser. Yet, in other known cases children have contemplated poisoning the food of their abuser. Such is the relationship between CSA, crime and violence which has the potential to ruin the safety, security and human dignity of girls.

**CSA and resiliency**

Sometimes, girls who experience CSA are resilient and do live lives to their full potential. Studies of CSA have found 21% - 49% of the children suffer no long term symptoms (Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993). Studies show that women survivors of CSA that are resilient benefited from growing up in more stable homes; characterized by fewer moves; less parental drug abuse; graduated from high school; receive attention from a mentor; being treated sensitively by siblings, teachers and social workers (Hyman & Williams, 2001; Thomas & Hall, 2008). While it is true that some women may find ways to cope with the trauma in order to live a better life, it is believed that they vacillate from resiliency to thriving and victimhood as those memories may become untangled at any time during adulthood and cause psychosocial impairment.

**The family as a locus of human development**

It has been said across generations that the family is the ‘bed rock’ of society. But is this really a truism when it is there that the evil of CSA occurs? Affiliation as a capability is worthy of note as CSA takes place within the “family which is intended to be a safe place to live with others, engage in dual perspective of empathy and focuses on having a social base of self-respect and non humiliation, where one desires each other’s company, to enjoy relationships, to feel accepted, understood and to
love” (Nussbaum 2008). When CSA occurs, it often disrupts the socialization of children, family relationships become confusing resulting in family dysfunction of various kinds making the family a place of domestic tyranny. Given the fundamental role of women as mothers and caregivers charged with the responsibility for socialization of humanity, much more attention and investment into the family is needed thereby making its members capability ready and with agency to be productive and law abiding citizens.

During my experience as a social work practitioner, I came across many cases where mothers and other family members knew about the sexual abuse taking place, but did nothing about it. This secrecy or ‘child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome’ as described by Roland, S, 1983 cited in London, Brick, Ceci and Shuman (2005) or complicit silence, denial and failure to take appropriate action is one major factor that contributes to the perpetuation of CSA within the family. In another clinical experience, 28 year old Cafina writes about her childhood sexual ordeal:

“As early as 3 years old I remember coming home from preschool in my red and white uniform…I met my cousin in the house…he put me to sit on the bed, lifted my skirt, pulled down my underwear and fondled me … he had long nails…the next time was about 5 or 6 years…my parents were not at home… I was asleep in the room that many of us shared… I was awakened as I felt someone … my virginia. This happened many times. I felt confused … I told my mother and she did not believe me. I can remember my mother holding me in the bedroom from about 4:00 pm until 9:00 pm until my father came home to tell him how I made false allegations about his cousin…He bit me…I am a Christian now…I forgive my parents…”

In cases where parents, particularly mothers do not believe their children and model self protective behaviour; do not provide children with relevant information, or fail to adequately supervise their children, there is a likelihood of capability deficiency. The family ought to be a locus of human development, i.e., the social institution to nourish human capabilities for the highest good of all. The family must be at the forefront of any sustainable human development paradigm, program, services and policies. It is imperative that the family must not be seen as sacrosanct or a private institution. The state must play an integral role to value the family as an institution to be studied, monitored and develop policies in the same manner that it is done for the economic and financial institutions.

The Small Island dynamic and dilemma: Implications for good governance

The Caribbean islands have peculiarities and challenges in responding to CSA. The islands have close family ties and the physical proximity of family household creates interesting family dynamics that affects reporting. Therefore, the notion of what happens in the family stays in the family gives rise to a distorted sense of family loyalty compounded with issues of complicity, silence and denial of the occurrence of CSA in the home. This further translates to an ethical dilemma within the family of deciding who is most deserving of protection: should it be the adult abuser or the child? Due to poverty and the economic and social reliance of many Caribbean women on men, action which may affect the main breadwinner such as reporting abuse is often undermined by women themselves (Jones & Jemmott, 2009). More often than not, the abuser is protected through non reporting leaving the child to cope with the unresolved traumatic experiences that threaten her capability and functionings.

Another extra ordinary island dynamic is that in some cases the perpetrator may be in a position of power or is likely to know someone who is and may be able to influence the outcome of the report (Jones and Jemmott, 2009:2) in favour of the perpetrator. By so doing, daughters are made to be the sacrificial lamb taking responsibility for the false honour of the men in the family. Yet, other features of the Caribbean islands are that anonymity and confidentiality in reporting cannot be assured, and the procedures for dealing with reports, systems for monitoring abuse and services to deal with the impact of disclosure are underdeveloped (Jones and Jemmott, 2009:2). The latter is further exacerbated with “turf” issues amongst the agencies responsible for child protection.

CSA is by all means a complex issue in small islands and good governance which is “deemed necessary to achieve the goals of sustainable human development” (Good governance, practice for the protection of human rights, 2007) should be a transversal line that cuts across all the domains of prevention, intervention and treatment. Good governance “encompass full respect of human rights, the rule of law, effective participation, multi-actor partnerships, political pluralism, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, an efficient and effective public sector, legitimacy, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people,
equity, sustainability and attitudes and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance” (Ibid.).

The key attributes of good governance include; responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness” (Ibid.) are also relevant to manage the obstacles of power, turf and professional jealousy amongst stakeholders and agencies, and better manage collaborative action and integration of a shared human development agenda with multiple institutions of health, education, justice, social services, community and the family.

Conclusions

I have attempted to show that non resilient girls who are victims of CSA are deprived of their capabilities and functionings to live life that is worthy of their human dignity, expand their choices, freedom and agency to secure a future for themselves and for the sustainable development of Caribbean islands. While, increased GDP does not always make a difference in measuring the quality of people’s lives, a human development approach provides a framework for evaluating the impact of CSA on the well becoming children into adulthood. However, further research is necessary in order to theorize and measure the real impact of CSA on the sustainable human development of Caribbean islands.

Since the most important determinant to a country’s competiveness is its human talent, the skills, education and productivity of its workforce (World Economic Forum Report, 2010), we must consider the role of the Nikitas and how their childhood traumatic experiences can hinder their human development and their participation in the development process of Caribbean islands. In an effort to strengthen women’s human development, which ultimately redounds to economic growth, CSA must be eradicated, justice must be served in all cases prosecuted, girls must be made to stay in school, treatment must be given and families supported. Islands must honour their obligations to the CRC and introduce child friendly and family centered laws, policies, and evidence based services and programs to respond to this silent crime.

One cardinal lesson learnt from this study is that we should never assume that children are safe under the omnipotent mantle of adult protection in the home. The family should not be off limits for public scrutiny because of its profound role in the nurturing of the capabilities of its members. Therefore, public policy must be enacted and implemented to protect and claim the human capability within the family that is required for sustainable human development and the wealth of Caribbean islands. There is need to build the agency of communities, families and civil society to be vigilant, to blow the whistle, break the silence and play a more direct role to intervene and provide supportive and therapeutic resources that are necessary to stamp out this menace. Failing to do this will result in Caribbean islands not capitalizing on the full potential of their society’s human talent and resources towards meaningful development amidst the current global economic crisis and future uncertainties.

References


