

## ABSTRACT

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN JAMAICA

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Violence against women in Jamaica is highlighted in the media as a topical subject, yet one which is under-reported and shrouded in secrecy. The commitment by the Government to control the incidence is vested in the law through the Offenses Against the Persons Act which seeks, through the courts, to punish abusers. The establishment of women's organizations and other lobby groups provide psychological and social support for abused women through various fora and creative activities.

Violence against women in Jamaica has deep roots in Caribbean cultural history manifested by the gender approach, stereotypes of women, and the attitudes of both the abuser and the abused. Women in many instances perpetuate these trends by demonstrating the female dependency syndrome, lacking the will to succeed, not seizing opportunities for upward mobility and not acquiring skills for their social and economic independence. A minority of Jamaican women have succeeded in transcending traditional barriers, entering male dominated fields, and sustaining successful careers on the social scene. This transition has also increased their vulnerability to abuse despite their social mobility.

Abused women are characterized by psychological manifestations of feeling embarrassed, ashamed, fearful of threats by the abuser, and a feeling of being blamed. There may be physical manifestations of injury, depending on the instrument of abuse. Long term effects are manifested in depression, anxiety, disturbed sleep, unhygienic feelings and possibly suicidal attempts (Morrison 1990).

This study is aimed at gaining an insight into the problem of violence against women in Jamaica, and the consequences for the health and well being of women. An attempt is made to improve the limited data base as a contribution to the efforts being made to address this problem of a public health significance. The results from the small sample in this study indicated that women most vulnerable to abuse were those who were single, unskilled, and with a low level of education. The incidence of incest and rape were highest among single women, and the unskilled experienced various types of abuses. Factors such as improved education and skills training were considered as positive indicators for empowering women to become independent, thus decreasing their vulnerability to abuse.