

# **ABSTRACT**

## **Risk Factors for Child Abuse in Dominica**

**Griffin Carty Benjamin**

The abuse of children is a public health problem in Dominica. This has stirred immense public reactions by many interest groups. There are several risk factors associated with the phenomena. However, the management of this problem in Dominica is limited by insufficient information on the direct etiological factors associated with child abuse.

This study aimed to investigate the biological, psychological and social factors associated with abused children, their parents and alleged abusers that correlate with the occurrence of child abuse in Dominica. It consisted of a case-control study with individually matched pairs, designed to describe the typical bio-psychosocial profile of a Dominican child who suffered abuse.

The results showed significant differences between children who were reportedly abused and their control counterparts. Inadequate living arrangements; loss of parents, particularly mother; poor engagement in social activities with their parents and limited attendance at church services were predictive of abuse. Also children with behavioral problems and mental disabilities were prone to abuse.

Parents who lost their mothers before age 16 years and who used alcohol and/or other drugs were at greater risk of parenting abused children. Alleged abusers were likely to be persons who were parents themselves but had none of their children living with them, who grew up in other homes apart from their biological parents' and who were likely to have been arrested by the police.

The families at risk of abusive experiences were characterized by parents losing their parents during childhood, with greater use of alcohol and other drugs. Children losing their parents, and having behavioral problems and mental disability and poor social interactions with their parents.

These findings are informative and can be used to guide policy makers in developing an integrative bio-psychosocial approach in managing the problem of child abuse.

**Keywords:** Griffin Carty Benjamin; Dominica; Child abuse; Risk factors.