

How Safe Are Caribbean Homes for Women and Children?

Attitudes toward Intimate Partner Violence and Corporal Punishment

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Abstract

This policy brief uses data from the 2014/2015 Latin American Public Opinion Project survey to examine attitudes toward intimate partner violence and child physical discipline in six Caribbean countries. Although Latin America has a reputation for a particularly macho culture, Caribbean adults were 10.8 percent more likely to tolerate a man beating his wife if she neglects the household chores and 5.7 percent more likely to if she is unfaithful. Characteristics of those who were more tolerant of intimate partner violence included being lower income, younger, resident of a rural area, and not completing secondary education. Similarly, those who say it is necessary to physically punish children in the Caribbean—and those who experienced physical punishment frequently themselves—were more prevalent than in Latin American countries. Experiencing frequent physical punishment during childhood was found to be a statistically significant correlate of male tolerance of intimate partner violence after controlling for other individual characteristics. Policy options to prevent intimate partner violence and childhood violence are examined.

JEL codes: I39, J12, O54, Y80

Key words: Caribbean, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, physical discipline, attitudes

Introduction

The impact of violence on different gender groups (men, women, boys, and girls) is still understudied particularly in contexts—such as those of many Caribbean countries—characterized by high levels of urban violence. In these contexts, emphasis is often placed on homicide and violent criminal activity, which have predominantly male victims. However, women and children suffer disproportionately from different kinds of violence than adult men—including intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, family violence, and child abuse. It is estimated that nearly one in three women in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region will experience violence in her lifetime, typically at the hands of an intimate partner¹ (Bott, Guedes, Goodwin, and Mendoza 2012).

The empirical research on violence against women and children in the Caribbean is limited. Existing studies have focused mainly on specific groups of high risk females (for example, women treated in the emergency room or at crisis centers) or other subgroups (college or secondary students). However, experts agree that the best estimates of prevalence of violence against women come from population-based surveys of women's health.² Despite their widespread use in Latin America, similar surveys have generally not been applied in the Caribbean,³ leaving us with a limited understanding of the extent of the problem in the subregion.

However, there is strong evidence in international literature that norms related to justification of wife beating are highly correlated with actual levels of IPV perpetration.⁴ Various theories—feminist theory, social construction theory, and norm theory—argue that partner violence is a function of social norms that grant men the right to control women. Empirical studies have largely supported this. Men's attitudes have been found to be more strongly predictive of IPV prevalence, while it has been suggested that women's responses may be reflective of perceptions of local norms rather than their own beliefs (Hindin, Kishor, and Ansara 2008). Likewise, very recent research supports the idea that changing norms on acceptability of IPV is an important mechanism for reducing IPV victimization and perpetration (Ambransky et al. 2014).

¹ *Intimate partner violence* refers to behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors. See <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

² Such as those used in the 2010 WHO multicountry study. See Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005.

³ The one exception is the Jamaica 2008 Reproductive Health Survey, which contained several questions on IPV using a similar methodology.

⁴ Evidence from more than 35 population-based studies, in every major continent, has demonstrated that tolerance of IPV is predictive of higher prevalence of IPV. See an overview in Heise 2011.

There is also strong evidence of linkages between IPV and experiences of childhood violence. The same underlying logic is often applied and framed as “educating”, or correcting defiance of male or parental authority. Longitudinal studies in high-income countries have established childhood experiences of violence as a causal factor for IPV perpetration (Capaldi and Clark, 1998; Magdol et al.1998; Swinford et al. 2000; Ehrensaft et al. 2003). Although no such studies have been completed in low- and middle-income countries, cross-sectional studies find a strong and consistent association between partner violence perpetration by men, experiencing harsh physical punishment as a child, and witnessing violence at home (see an overview in Heise 2011).

Using data from the Latin American Opinion Project (LAPOP) in 2014/2015, this brief explores the level of acceptance of IPV against women in six Caribbean countries. Levels of tolerance are compared among the Caribbean countries and to the average of eight Latin American countries.⁵ Then, the brief explores the sociodemographic characteristics of Caribbean respondents that are tolerant of IPV. Finally, beliefs and experiences regarding the use of physical discipline on children and their linkages to IPV acceptance are examined. Policy implications are then discussed.

Attitudes toward IPV against Women in the Caribbean

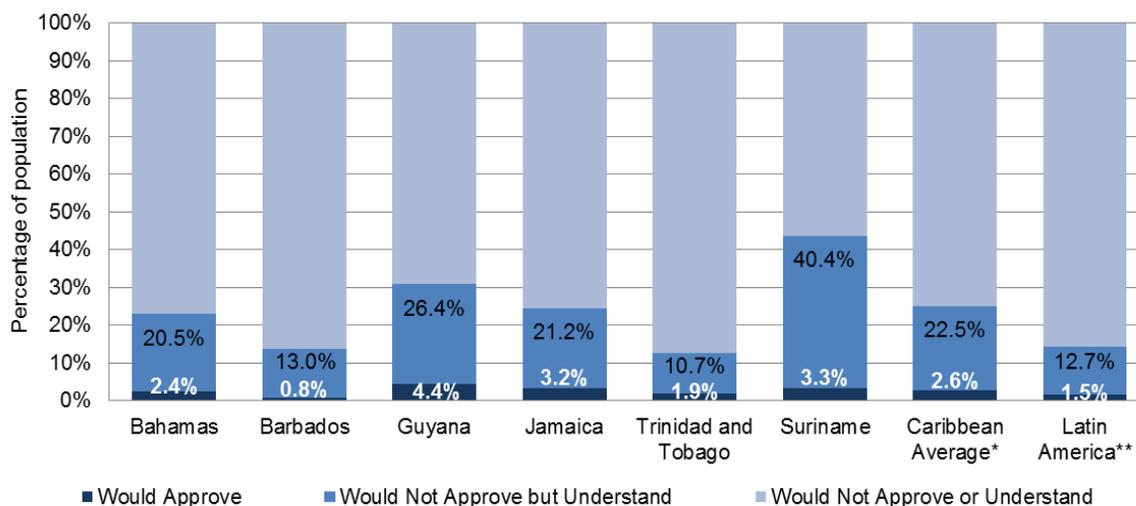
Although little is known about the prevalence of intimate partner violence across the subregion, there is evidence of acceptance of violence and traditional gender norms, which are often linked to higher levels of violence against women in societies. For example, data from the Jamaican Reproductive Health Survey (2008) show that Jamaican women are more than twice as likely as their peers from Latin-America to agree women have an obligation to have unwanted sex with their husband (30 percent vs. <15 percent) (Bott et al. 2012). In the same survey, 48.6 percent of Jamaican women and 55.4 percent of Jamaican men said that a good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees. Two out of every five Jamaican men (40 percent) said that it is important for a man to show his wife or partner who is the boss (Serrbanescu et al. 2008, 388–9).

Regarding attitudes toward IPV, Figure 1 presents the tolerance among Caribbean adults of a husband hitting his wife if she neglects the household chores. One in four (27.5 percent of men and 22.6 percent of women) would approve or understand. On average,

⁵ The Latin American countries include Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Caribbean respondents were statistically more likely than were Latin Americans (difference: 10.8 percentage points) to approve or understand hitting a women under these circumstances.

Figure 1. His wife neglects the household chores. Would you approve of the husband hitting his wife, not approve but understand, or neither approve nor understand?



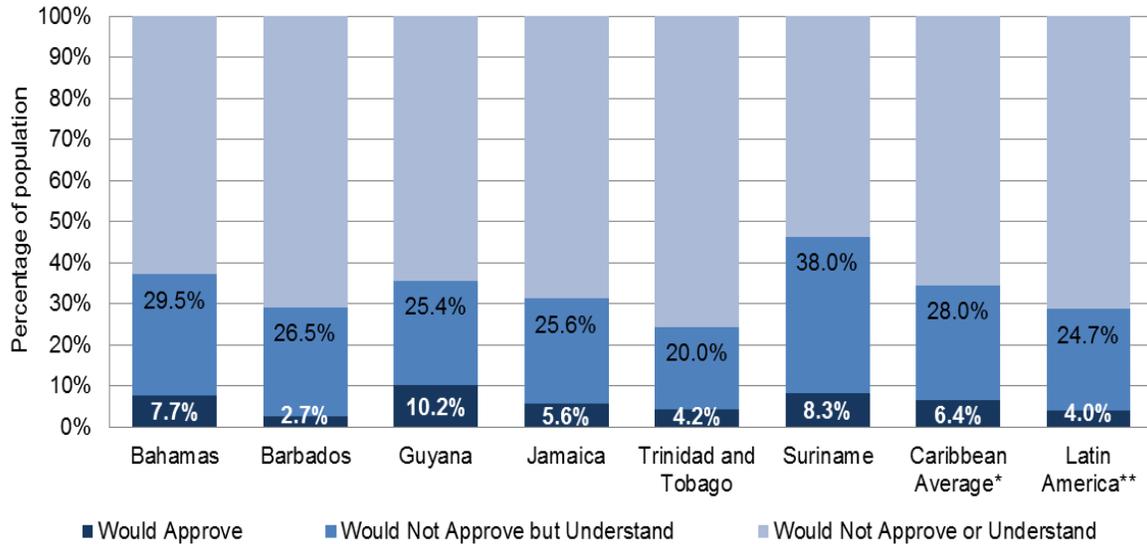
Source: Analysis based on data from 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Project.

*Caribbean average includes Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

**Latin American average includes Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Tolerance for hitting a woman is higher if she is unfaithful; one in three Caribbean residents would approve or understand (39 percent of men and 30 percent of women) in this scenario. Acceptance is highest in Suriname where nearly half (46.5 percent) of adults would approve of or understand hitting a woman under these circumstances. Again, Caribbean adults were significantly more likely than were Latin Americans to tolerate violence against women if she is unfaithful (5.7 percentage-point difference). Outright approval was highest in Guyana (10.2 percent), Suriname (8.3 percent), and The Bahamas (7.7 percent). “Understanding,” which might be interpreted as tacit acceptance, was highest in Suriname (38 percent), followed by The Bahamas (29.5 percent) and Guyana (25.4 percent).

Figure 2. His wife is unfaithful. Would you approve of the husband hitting his wife, not approve but understand, or neither approve nor understand?



Source: Analysis based on data from 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Project.

*Caribbean average includes Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

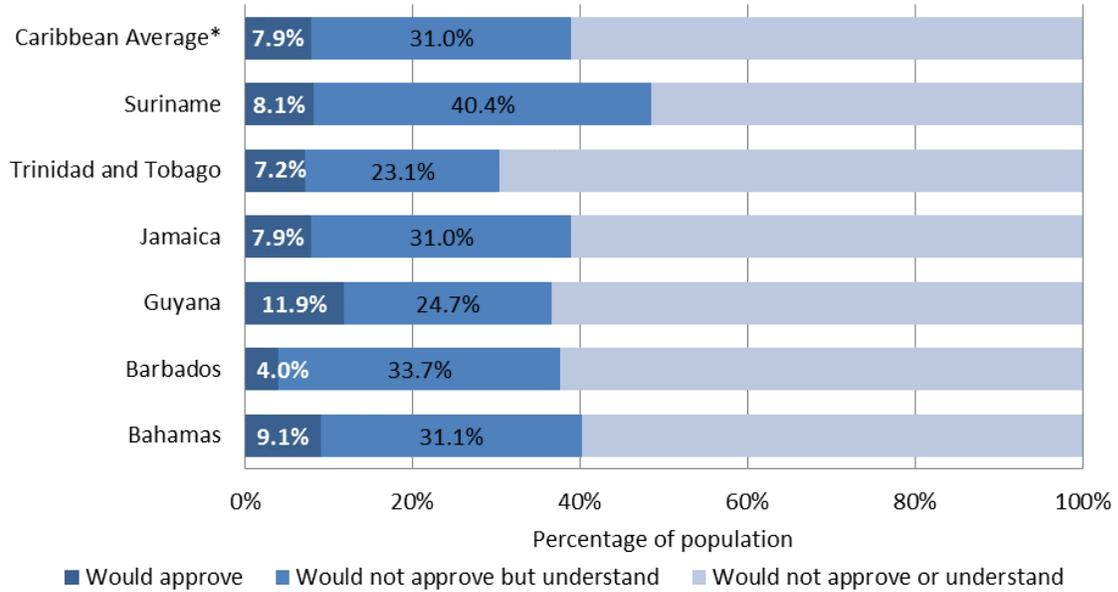
**Latin American average includes Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Who Is More Tolerant of IPV in the Caribbean?

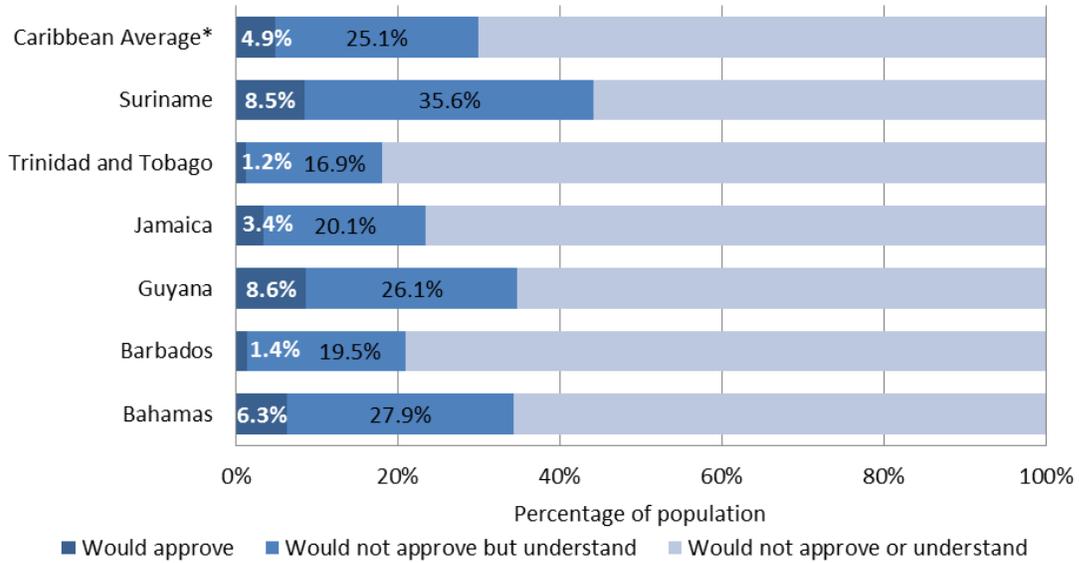
Caribbean men were significantly more likely than women to approve of a man hitting his wife for being unfaithful (7.9 percent of men and 4.9 percent of women) (Figure 5). Men were also more likely to understand (31 percent of men and 25.1 percent of women). One interesting acceptance is Suriname, where women were as likely as men to approve and only slightly less likely to understand. The starkest contrasts between men and women are apparent in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Figure 5. His wife is unfaithful. Would you approve of the husband hitting his wife, not approve but understand, or neither approve nor understand?

Male Respondents



Female Respondents



The sociodemographic characteristics of survey respondents who tolerate (approve or understand) and do not tolerate IPV are described in Table 1. It is notable that the majority of respondents were single for both genders.

Table 1. Individual Characteristics of Respondents

Sample	Men		Women	
	Approves or understands	Does not approve or understand	Approves or understands	Does not approve or understand
Age (years)	38.8	40.3	38.5	39.8
Occupation outside the home (%)	42	45	33	40
Income group (1–16) ⁶	8	9	7	8
Children (number)	1.99	1.93	2.21	2.04
Marital status (%)				
Married	26	31	28	31
Common law (living together)	16	14	18	15
Civil union	0	0	0	0
Single	49	46	43	43
Divorced	3	3	3	3
Separated	3	2	2	2
Widowed	3	3	5	6
Years of education	10.5	10.9	10.5	11.0
Urban residence (%)	78	79	73	81
Receives government assistance (%)	14	10	18	12
<i>n</i>	3,180	4,907	2,397	5,750

Ordinary least squares regression of 9,285 individual responses from the five Caribbean countries (see the annex), using country fixed effects⁷, reveals that statistically significant factors associated with tolerance of intimate partner violence among men included age (younger), income (lower), and a history of physical punishment as a child. Women were statistically more likely to have tolerant attitudes if they were younger, had lower income, and received government assistance. Significant protective factors (negatively associated with tolerance) included living in an urban area (for women) and completion of secondary school (for men).

⁶ On the Latin American Public Opinion Project surveys, individuals are asked of their household income range. Possible household income categories range from 1–16, 1 being the lowest group and 16 being the highest. The corresponding range for each category is based on local currency and represent different amounts in each country

⁷ By including fixed effects (group dummies) for each country, we control for the average differences across countries in any observable or unobservable predictors. Therefore we are left only with the within country variation.

When focusing in on only those who explicitly approved of IPV, we find that most of the same correlates continue to be significant for men: younger age, lower income (+), and urban residence (-). For both men and women, completion of secondary school is a significant protective factor. Other cross-country studies have found that the completion of secondary education has a protective effect against risk of IPV that primary school alone does not provide (Ambransky et al. 2011). Our findings on tolerant attitudes toward IPV appear to be consistent with this literature.

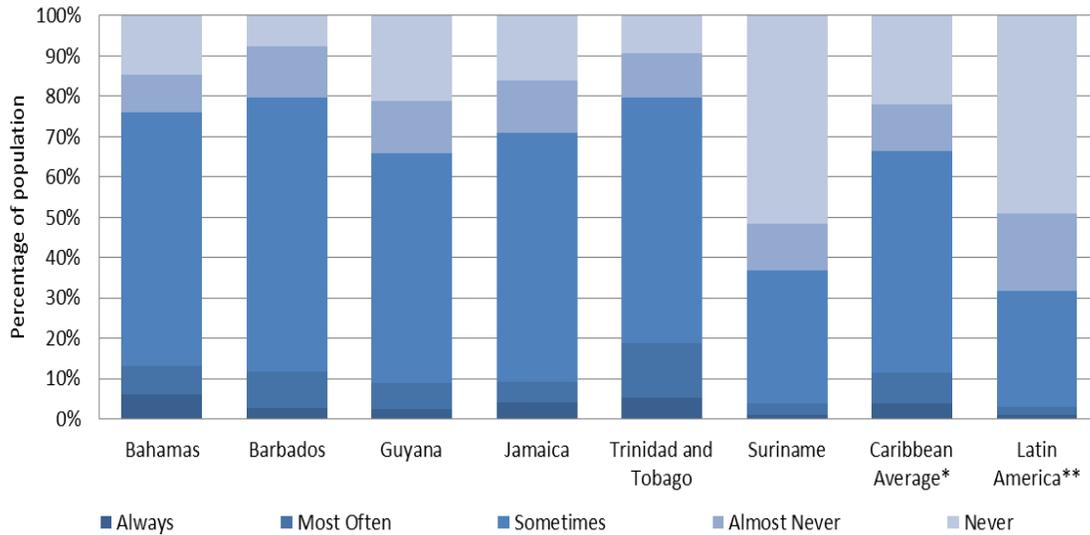
Exposure to and Acceptance of Childhood Violence in the Caribbean

The Caribbean has a unique history with respect to children's rights and corporal discipline. Some regional studies suggest that the legacy of slavery may help to explain the social and cultural traditions that support the use of physical punishment on children (UNICEF 2006). It has also been suggested that an acceptance of corporal punishment in families and institutions can be traced to British cultural influences and religious influences (UNICEF 2006).

The majority (66 percent) of Caribbean respondents (65 percent of men and 68 percent of women) say that it is necessary to physically discipline a child who misbehaves. Caribbean respondents were significantly more likely to believe it is necessary to use of physical punishment on children than Latin Americans (2.7 percent more likely to say always, 5.9 percent most often, and 26.3 percent sometimes). The exception is Suriname where levels are on par with the Latin American average.

Of those who support use of physical punishment in the Caribbean, 91 percent (93 percent men and 89 percent women) admit to suffering corporal punishment themselves as children. Only 13 percent of those who suffered physical punishment themselves considered corporal punishment to be unacceptable.

Figure 6. Do you think that to correct a child who misbehaves it is necessary to hit or physically punish them?

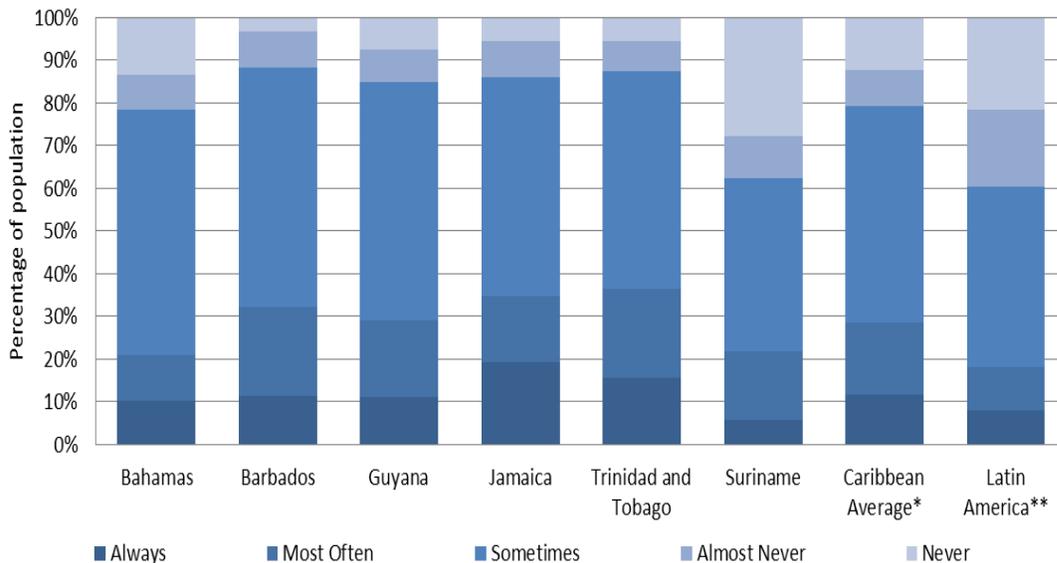


Source: Analysis based on data from 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Project.

*Caribbean average includes Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

**Latin American average includes Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Figure 7. When you were a child, your parents or guardians would hit or physically punish you in some way to correct your misbehavior?



Source: Analysis of data from 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Project.

*Caribbean average includes Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

**Latin American average includes Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

There was little difference between men and women in their experiences of, and attitudes toward, physical discipline of children. The difference between men and women was significant only among those who believed corporal punishment was always necessary (1 percent higher for men). Likewise, there was a slight difference between men and women (3.5 percent higher for men) who were physically punished “most often.” In all other categories, the difference was nonsignificant. This is generally consistent with findings from other surveys in the Caribbean (UNICEF 2006).⁸

There is a fine line between discipline and abuse, which is highly contested among different cultural settings. Unfortunately, the Latin American Public Opinion Project survey data do not allow for exploring the means and severity of physical discipline. However, the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey data⁹ indicate that the percent of households with at least one child 2–14 years where the child was subjected to severe physical punishment¹⁰ were 4.4 percent in Trinidad and Tobago (2006), 5.7 percent in Jamaica (2011), 6.1 percent Barbados (2012), 6 percent in Guyana, and 11.8 percent in Suriname (2010).¹¹ The Jamaican Reproductive Health Survey found that an alarmingly high amount of parents—41.6 percent of men and 36.2 percent of women—reported hitting the child with a belt, stick, or other object as punishment (Serrbanescu et al. 2008, 340–1).

Intersections between Attitudes Toward Violence against Women and Violence against Children

There are several parallels between violence against women and violence against children. Both stem from norms that justify the use of violence in order to educate or correct misbehavior. Co-occurrence of Intimate partner violence and child abuse is frequently documented in the literature (i.e., Herrenkohl et al. 2008). Often, women and children who are beaten do not seek help because of social norms that see such behavior as a private matter.¹² Surveys that aim to measure prevalence of both types of violence, around the world, have found that they are severely underestimated in police statistics because they are highly underreported. Legal protections are generally underenforced for both types of violence and this is especially true where social norms are not in step with those legal protections. Last, there are intergenerational consequences for violence against women and violence against children.

⁸ See also publications with the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey datasets 2010–2016 for Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname. <http://mics.unicef.org/surveys>

⁹ Involves interviews of women 15–49 years and children ages 5 years and younger.

¹⁰ Severe physical punishment includes hitting or slapping the child in the face, head or ears, beating the child up with an implement (hit over and over as hard as one could). See UNICEF, 2010, 15.

¹¹ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey datasets. See <http://mics.unicef.org/surveys>

¹² In 2014, only 14 percent of women formally reported violence against them in Latin America and the Caribbean. See World Bank 2014.

Of Caribbean adults who approve of or understand a man hitting his wife if she is unfaithful, 86 percent (88 percent of men and 82 percent of women) also reported having been physically disciplined themselves as children. Of course, not all those who are physically disciplined as children display tolerant attitudes toward IPV. However, at the individual level, when controlling for other individual characteristics and differences between countries¹³ (see the annex), men across the Caribbean were statistically more likely to display tolerant attitudes regarding violence against women if they were exposed to frequent physical discipline¹⁴ themselves as children. The association holds even in Suriname where overall tolerance of wife beating was higher and experiences of childhood physical discipline lower than other countries in the region. The connection is consistent with the international literature, which suggests that children who experience or witness violence are more likely than those who do not to perpetrate violence later in life (see Capaldi et al. 1998; Capaldi et al. 2003; Kishor and Johnson 2004; Fulu et al. 2013). Violent discipline has also been found to be more common in households affected by intimate partner violence than in households that are not (Bott et al. 2012).

Conclusions and Policy Implications

There appears to be a relatively high tolerance for intimate partner violence against women in the Caribbean. Although Latin America maintains the stigma of having a particularly “macho” culture, in the Caribbean acceptance of wife beating is even higher. Collecting more accurate data on prevalence of violence against women, using internationally vetted methods, is an important next step for governments of countries in the Caribbean. However, many studies have found that the degree to which wife beating is accepted is one of the strongest and most consistent factors that predict differences in prevalence across sites and countries.¹⁵ Therefore, it is not unprecedented to use these norms as a proxy for levels of IPV in a country.

Although legislation in Caribbean countries is relatively comprehensive in its coverage of domestic violence, the reality is that this type of violence is often sanctioned more by cultural beliefs and attitudes than by the law. The good news is that there is some evidence that interventions to change social norms can have a positive effect on reducing levels of IPV. While many one-off awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns have shown no evidence of impact, there are two strategies that have been more rigorously evaluated and demonstrated modest changes in reported attitudes. These include small group/community participatory workshops and larger-scale educational entertainment campaign efforts using various media sources

¹³ This is done using country fixed effects

¹⁴ Frequent physical discipline was defined as when it was used always, most often, or sometimes.

¹⁵ See, for example, Abramsky et al. 2011.

(Heise 2011; Ellsberg 2014). For example, a randomized control trial found that the South African program Sisters for Life curriculum applied to small groups of women, combined with an existing microfinance program,¹⁶ reduced partner violence by 51 percent over two years. A second study of the same program found that the positive impacts on violence were more a function of the training than the microcredit component (Kim et al. 2009, 824). Other small scale community mobilization programs working with both men and women have also shown promising results.¹⁷

Educational entertainment interventions, which develop and deliver radio and television programs to change norms, have been less rigorously evaluated, but seem to show promise.¹⁸ In addition, because social hierarchies (men over women and parents over children) are often considered to be justified in religious texts in the Caribbean, it might be important to consider finding faith leaders willing to challenge these social norms.

Interventions to change norms and reduce IPV are most effective when they target individuals and communities displaying key risk factors. This brief shows that the factors associated with having a tolerant attitude toward IPV in the Caribbean are similar to the risk factors for perpetrating and being victim of IPV found in international literature. Lower income, young age, receiving government assistance (for women), rural residence, and incomplete secondary schooling were all significantly associated with tolerance of IPV.

Finally, initiatives to change norms are best when accompanied by interventions to prevent or reduce the use of violence during childhood. Providing early intervention for families at risk, through home visitation and parenting programs, can not only reduce childhood exposure to violence, but may also reduce future perpetration of IPV (Krug et al. 2002). There is strong evidence from high income countries that parenting programs can reduce harsh and abusive punishment and reduce behavior problems in children that are predictive of future violence perpetration (Wood and Barlow 2007; Gilbert et al. 2009; Kane, Mikton, and Butchart 2009). Although more research is needed, emerging studies from low- and middle-income countries are increasing showing similar results (for example, Eshel et al. 2006; Knerr et al.

¹⁶ The program combined the introduction of a poverty-targeted micro-finance and a participatory learning and action gender focused curriculum (Sisters for Life) for clients. The two components had, among many objectives, the aim to be reinforcing, to improve household well-being, communications and power relations. Qualitative data indicates that the reduction in violence experienced by the women was the result of women being able to challenge the acceptability of violence, accept better treatment, leave violent behavior, and raise awareness on the issue in their communities. See Kim et al. 2009.

¹⁷ These include a cluster randomized controlled trial on the SASA! program in Uganda (Abramsky et al. 2014), quasi-experimental evaluation of Tostan program in Senegal (Diop et al. 2004) and a cluster randomized controlled trial of the SHARE program also in Uganda (Wagman et al. 2014). For an overview, see Ellsberg 2014.

¹⁸ Such is the case of program implemented by Soul City Institute for Health and Development (South Africa), the NGO Breakthrough in India, and Puntos de Encuentro in Nicaragua. These interventions have all attempted to measure their impact, although through imperfect evaluation designs. Highlights of these evaluations are summarized in Heise 2011, 24–27.

2010). One particular program that has been evaluated in a number of countries and cultural contexts is the Positive Parenting Program (“Triple P”)¹⁹. Government-run national parenting programs are currently in place in a number of Caribbean countries (The Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, to name a few). However, to date there have been no evaluation of the impact of these programs.

Although policy makers are likely to be much more wary about legally interfering with a “parents’ right” to discipline their children, a recent comparative study of the effects of banning corporal punishment in five European countries suggests that it does shift what people define as violence and facilitate reductions in the use of violence. Longitudinal studies from Germany and Switzerland also show that acceptance and use of physical violence have declined overtime (Bussman et al. 2011).

Last, prioritizing programs which that aim to stop violence in the home before occurs, may also have broader long-term impact on overall societal violence and criminality in the Caribbean. After all, preventing violence in the home (against women and children) can stop children from growing up with increased aggression and emotional problems, which may prevent them from perpetrating violence and delinquency later in life.

¹⁹ The program was developed by the University of Queensland, is currently used in 25 countries, and has been shown to work across cultures, socioeconomic groups, and family structures. The body of evidence is the most extensive of any parenting program and comprises more than 250 published papers, including eight meta-analyses, 68 randomized clinical trials, 51 effectiveness and service-based evaluations, and 13 single-case studies.

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Annex

Ordinary Least Squares Regression Using Latin American Public Opinion Project Data 2014/2015 for the Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Q. dvw2 as outcome variable.

	Male	Female	Male	Female
Outcome	Approves and does not approve but understands	Approves and does not approve but understands	Approves	Approves
Age	-0.00238* (0.001000)	-0.00138* (0.000600)	-0.000917* (0.000406)	-0.000202 (0.000132)
Works outside the home	-0.00908 (0.0220)	-0.0285 (0.0174)	-0.000517 (0.0122)	-0.0122 (0.00813)
Income	-0.00374** (0.00128)	-0.00567** (0.00128)	-0.00331*** (0.000439)	-0.00201 (0.00100)
Children	0.00369 (0.00767)	0.00328 (0.00669)	0.00121 (0.00399)	-0.000626 (0.00228)
Single	0.00517 (0.0219)	0.0505 (0.0352)	0.00644 (0.0130)	-0.0140 (0.0131)
Married	0.0159 (0.0110)	0.00641 (0.0379)	0.00597 (0.0166)	-0.0218 (0.0143)
Common law	0.00644 (0.0111)	0.0383 (0.0501)	0.00653 (0.0205)	-0.00954 (0.0134)
Divorced	-0.0187 (0.0394)	0.0902 (0.0883)	-0.0288 (0.0221)	-0.00236 (0.0274)
Separated	0.0136 (0.0293)	0.0539 (0.0414)	-0.00413 (0.0323)	0.000849 (0.0334)
Secondary Education	-0.0456* (0.0194)	-0.00858 (0.0186)	-0.0324* (0.0160)	-0.0241* (0.0106)
Urban residence	-0.00421 (0.0231)	-0.0891** (0.0282)	-0.0141** (0.00423)	-0.0402** (0.0151)
Government Assistance	0.0529 (0.0304)	0.0407** (0.0146)	0.00895 (0.0187)	0.0175 (0.00925)
Physical Punishment	0.0393** (0.0108)	-0.0190 (0.0142)	0.00259 (0.00606)	-0.0119 (0.0116)
_cons	0.466*** (0.0283)	0.389*** (0.0319)	0.203*** (0.0253)	0.118** (0.0263)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4647	4638	4647	4638

Standard errors clustered at country level in parentheses

** p<0.10

** p<0.05

*** p<0.001"

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