

Dear Editor,

As we join with the world in observance of the sixteen days of activism for the elimination of violence against women and girls, Help & Shelter acknowledges all funding agencies, government ministries, non-governmental and civil society organisations, faith-based organisations and other groups who have been diligently working to address issues surrounding intimate partner and other forms of violence affecting our country, being mindful however that we should not get stuck in the vicious cycle of reinventing the wheel but seeking to build upon existing foundations, to expand beyond our comforts, take new risks and embrace new challenges as we seek to eliminate violence in all its forms against women and girls in a world impacted by the novel corona virus pandemic.

The past year has been very challenging for many and has been no different for us at Help & Shelter who have had to adopt new measures in providing much needed education, counselling, shelter and other support measures to survivors of violence and others affected by the scourge of violence.

In Guyana, the number of deaths as a result of intimate partner violence continues its upward trajectory, reaching in excess of twenty victims so far this year, with young adults accounting for the most severe and extreme forms of homicide/suicide, alerting us to a population that needs urgent attention.

Although we have seen a decline in face-to-face clients compared to the same period last year, with Covid 19 lockdowns and curfew measures, the incidence of violence against women and girls in Guyana and the wider world has skyrocketed. Between April and November we have recorded over a 300% increase in calls to our hotline service. Our shelter is at full capacity and over the past seven months we have had to refuse over 35 survivors and their children.

One critical observation from reports made is the fact that women and their children not only suffer violence but are often faced with the reality of homelessness should they make the decision to escape their abusers. Over the past year, around 33% of our clients complained of being put out of the home by abusers or other family members, being engaged in battles to avoid being put out or having nowhere to go or the means to provide accommodation for themselves and children.

Elimination of violence against women and girls will remain an illusion if every aspect of the problem is not given adequate and effective attention. It is a known fact that women and girls are in the majority the survivors of violence and men the main perpetrators, yet very little is done to address male attitudes and behaviors toward the use of violence. The focus appears to be targeting contributing factors rather than the contributor. We at Help & Shelter reiterate that men and boys (perpetrators in particular) need to be a key target population in this fight. Over the years we have engaged with male perpetrators of violence referred by the courts and other agencies. The main objective of these engagements is to provide education and impress upon perpetrators the importance of being accountable for their violent actions and taking responsibility for change. Two important observations are the lack of information about what constitutes violence and ignorance of the law relating to domestic and sexual violence among men. Added to this is the need for spaces where men can open up and speak about their violent childhood experiences which are at the root of many men's violence against women.

Help & Shelter encourages all sectors in their various capacities to "Orange your world: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect" in bringing about the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

Yours faithfully,

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For Help & Shelter