

## **Educator's Perceptions of the Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies**

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### **Abstract**

*Globally, school violence plays an ominous role in the education process as it has been widely recognized as having negative impacts. In this context, education in a violence-free environment is a challenge facing some schools, students and teachers in the Caribbean. Internationally, school violence is a relatively well researched area, however, both internationally and in the Caribbean, educator's perceptions of the impacts of school violence is relatively understudied. This study explores educator's perceptions of the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies and offers an interpretive exploration of these perceptions. Self-administered questionnaires were randomly distributed to educators in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. To analyze the data, frequency distribution was used and the data converted into percentages. The results gleaned from one hundred and twenty respondents indicate that school violence has impacts at the individual, institutional and community levels.*

Keywords: Educator's, perceptions, impact, education, school violence, Caribbean

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globally, school violence plays an ominous role in the education process as it has been widely recognized as having negative impacts on the well-being of persons involved (victims, perpetrators, teachers and community residents). Violence at school appears to be no exception for students and teachers in the Caribbean and based on media reports, anecdotal evidence and scholarly research, violence at schools in the region appears to be on the increase. That school violence is increasing throughout the Caribbean and that some schools are increasingly being transformed into arenas for violence emanates from research by Lall (2013), UNICEF (2005), Belle (2006), Phillips (2008), Williams (2009), Mustapha (2013), Gowrie and Ramdass (2014) and Grant (2017).

The occurrence of school violence and its impacts on Caribbean societies should not be viewed in a simplistic matter as violence at school not only represents a violation of the rights of children but also acts as a significant barrier to the achievement of international goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) objectives (Pereznieto et al., 2010). However,

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

while school violence is a relatively well researched area in the international arena, both internationally and in the Caribbean, the perceptions of school violence held by educators who are shared stakeholders in schools are relatively understudied (see Fisher & Kettl, 2003). Despite school violence in the Caribbean being relatively under-researched, it impacts the well-being of persons involved. With this in mind, the current effort was conceptualized to facilitate an understanding of educator's perceptions of the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies.

### **BACKGROUND**

There is an increasing body of literature noting an increase in school violence in the Caribbean (see Belle, 2006; Gowrie & Ramdass, 2014; James et al., 2014; Lall, 2013; Wallace & Figuera, 2018; Williams, 2009), however, the more fundamental and more nebulous concerns of the impact of school violence have not even been addressed in the criminological literature in the Caribbean. More worrisome is the fact that the impact of school violence has not been examined through the lens of teachers, remains "relatively understudied" (Fisher & Kettl 2003, p. 80) and generally undocumented. While extensive reviews of the literature on school violence highlighted a range of research on educator's perceptions on school violence (Schubarth, 2000; Finley, 2003; Sumer & Cetinkaya, 2004; Smith & Smith, 2006; Crump Jr., 2009; Geissler, 2015; Anderson, 2016), limited information on educator's perceptions of the impacts of school violence in the Caribbean was unearthed. Therefore, while much is known about the causes, contributory factors, effects, and social contexts of school violence, very little is known about the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies.

That researchers in the Caribbean have been slow to analyze educator's perceptions of school violence and its putative criminogenic impact on Caribbean societies is paradoxical as well as 'a glaring omission' (Fisher and Kettl, 2003). The result is that statistically, the impact of school violence in the Caribbean is less visible than its causes and extent and much less visible are educator perceptions of these impacts.

Given the paucity of research on the thoughts and impressions of school violence from the perspective of Caribbean teachers (see Akpaka et al., 2011 as an exception), it was important to utilize educator's perceptions to describe and account for the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies. In light of this, the current effort addresses this important research gap by focusing on an investigation into a group of Caribbean teachers and their perceptions of the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies. The study therefore attempts to discuss and clarify the conspicuous shortcoming related to the impact of school violence on stakeholders within the education system in the Caribbean.

### **Importance of Educator's Perceptions of the impact of School Violence**

Local legislators, policy makers, academics and educators have offered strategies aimed at preventing violent acts at schools in the Caribbean due to its perceived

negative impacts. However, on a macro level, teachers at schools in the Caribbean are faced with a constant barrage of violence at their schools on a continuum that differs from school to school and from island to island. For these teachers, exposure to violence at school is increasingly being recognized as a component of the life history of persons in the teaching profession. Educator exposure to violence at schools also highlights the importance of considering their thoughts and impressions in light of the possible impacts that school violence might have on them. Educator's perceptions of the impact of violent acts at school is also important as it influences their interaction with students, choice of teaching locale, job retention, attrition, and policy they support surrounding this issue (see Crump Jr., 2009). Most importantly, teachers are often at the forefront of school violence as they frequently observe violence in their schools, and are often victims of this violence (Fisher & Kettl, 2003). Added to that, educators also know the children and the social system of schools better than any other group (Fisher & Kettl, 2003) and their insights into the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies are essential.

Anderson (2016) points out that the analysis of the educator's perceptions of school violence may allow schools to understand how school safety initiatives can be developed and implemented into learning, while Finley (2003) submits that teachers play an integral role in creating a healthy school environment that can prevent or control violent disruptions and intimates that their voices should be heard. Importantly, the perceptions of educators are important in terms of creating violence free schools (Altun & Baker, 2010), while comparing the viewpoints of educators from different backgrounds may contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue, making this a vital element for developing meaningful interventions (Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2003). With the aforementioned in mind, the current effort required the input of Caribbean teachers to identify their perceptions of school violence and its impacts on Caribbean societies.

### **Conceptual Analysis of School Violence**

There is no clear definition as to what constitutes school violence as 'the concept is complex' (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Trakman, 2008) and as there are many available definitions for the term. The end result is that measuring perceptions of school violence at the regional and international level is notoriously difficult as the concept itself is susceptible to various analyses. In spite of the difficulty in conceptualizing school violence, it is important to conduct a conceptual analysis of the term. This conceptual analysis is not concerned with the testing hypotheses or constructing theories, but is concerned with clarifying the meaning of the concept - school violence. Some scholars, researchers and academics may liken this conceptual analysis to 'linguistic semantics' or 'pure logomachy' (Baldwin, 1997), however, without a clear understanding of the concepts, there is the propensity for stakeholders to misunderstand each other (Baldwin, 1997). Added to this, it is important to define the concept so as 'to indicate its essence and its fundamental limits, and it must be the measured according to its applicability to solve problems.

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

The foregoing discussion on the need for clarity on the term 'school violence' is in line with the view of Oppenheim (cited in Greenstein & Polsby, 1975, p. 284) who argued that "the elucidation of the language of political science is by no means an idle exercise in semantics, but in many instances a most effective way to solve substantive problems of research." The analysis is also aligned with that of the 18th Century writer and philosopher Voltaire who stated 'If you want to converse with me, first define your terms'. It was therefore important to clearly define school violence so that it is neither mysterious nor esoteric.

Prinsloo & Naser's (2007, p. 47) elucidation of school violence is "...as any intentional physical or non-physical (verbal) condition or act resulting in physical or non-physical pain being inflicted on the recipient of that act while the recipient is under the school's supervision." Estévez et al. (2008, p. 4) note that "school violence is a kind of behaviour that includes the general characteristics of violent behaviour, with the difference that the actors are kids and adolescents and that it takes place in primary and secondary schools: in places where they are together for several hours a day all year." Understanding School Violence Fact Sheet (2013, p. 1) defines school violence in the following manner: "School violence is youth violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events, or during a school-sponsored event." Keeping in mind the varied notions of school violence, the term is operationalized in this study using aspects of Miller & Kraus's (2008) definition to include behaviors such as child and teacher victimization, child and/or teacher perpetration, physical and psychological exploitation, cyber victimization, cyber threats, fights, physical and psychological injury to teacher and student, sexual and other boundary violations, and use of weapons in the school environment.

### **METHOD**

This research is a descriptive study that was designed as an exploratory analysis intended to identify educator's perceptions of the impact of school violence on societies in the Caribbean. Its contribution to knowledge was constructed within the exploratory methodological apercu of Park & Burgess (1921) that focuses on illuminating phenomena rather than pursuing generalizability and hypothesis testing. The study was aimed at garnering and illuminating teacher perceptions of the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies in their environmental functioning as school violence is both viewed and understood by those within the teaching environment. A quantitative research method was used to conduct the study, however, a qualitative strand was embedded within the quantitative framework aimed at facilitating triangulation. As the researcher aimed to identify impacts of school violence on societies in the Caribbean, the following questions were regarded as critical to the study: Are there incidents of violence at schools in the Caribbean? What are there impacts of school violence on the stakeholders within the education system? How does violence at school impact Caribbean societies? Major goals of the author of this heuristic paper are: (1) wide readership that is not strictly confined to members of the academic community, and (2) the article should reach the population that is most affected by school violence

(students, teachers and policymakers) in a format that is easily understood. In light of this, multivariate analyses to explore how educator's perceptions of violence might vary based upon their demographics, characteristics of the school and the student population were deliberately avoided in favour of descriptive statistics and percentages that are more easily understood and appreciated by the general population.

### ***Population and Sample***

*Sampling:* A simple random sample of teachers were surveyed from a broad spectrum of schools (government, government assisted (church schools assisted financially by governments - also known as "assisted" schools), urban, semi-urban, rural, primary and secondary schools) in the different islands. Prior to distribution, a pilot study was conducted with a group of educators (n=30) in Trinidad and Tobago where the researcher was based. Based on the information gleaned from the pilot study, modifications were made to the questionnaire. The survey instrument was then randomly distributed by the primary researcher who was based in Trinidad and Tobago and by research assistants based in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines to three hundred educators throughout the Caribbean (fifty questionnaires per island).

*Procedure:* The research was conducted using data drawn from a simple random sample of teachers from various types of schools (identified in the population and sample above) in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Fifty questionnaires per island were distributed to these teachers by a network of regional research assistants based in the aforementioned jurisdictions. Such a distribution system was necessary as the exploratory research was conducted in several islands where the researcher was not physically present (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines). The research assistants were qualified up to the postgraduate level and were familiar with ethical standards of research. To bolster their knowledge base, the research assistants were provided with guidance and instruction via informative internet communication on the conduct of quantitative studies using questionnaires.

The respondents completed the self-administered questionnaire organized into two blocks, with 21 items, consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Section one of the structured questionnaire sought demographic details of the respondents, while section two provided general questions regarding the school in which the teachers taught and the incidence and impact of school-based violence on societies in the respective jurisdictions under enquiry. Questions on school violence were framed to elicit responses on witnessed violence at schools as well as who were the participants (perpetrators, victims). In addressing the impact of school violence on Caribbean communities, several questions were posed to the respondents; however, the main research question focused on educator's perceptions of the impact of school violence on Caribbean communities? For

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

impacts, respondents were also questioned on their perceptions regarding the possible impacts of school violence. Answer categories included: “yes,” “no,” and “don’t know” as well as responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The instrument also included qualitative sub-questions to facilitate discussion and capture additional information related to the impact of school violence in the Caribbean. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.72 and as this was a high positive coefficient; the assumption was that the questionnaire was reliable. Data collection for the study also involved integrating appropriate primary and secondary data.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were cleaned, collated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 17) software, percentages and tables. As the survey instrument contained open-ended questions, some qualitative data emanated from the research. As a result, the researcher thought it important to analyze the qualitative data and present some aspects as a part the results. The qualitative data were analyzed using ATLAS Ti software programme, which is particularly designed to organize, sort, and index qualitative data to show patterns (Grant, 2017). Content analyses of textual data were also used to analyze the qualitative data. The main objective of content analysis was to obtain the concepts and relationships that would explain the collected data (Yavuzer & Gundogdu, 2012; Yildirim & Simsek, 2005, p. 227).

### ***Ethical considerations***

As the study involved research conducted on human subjects, the research was designed to protect the privacy, integrity and dignity of the respondents. An introductory letter that explained the nature of the survey and a consent form were attached to the questionnaire. These were presented to prospective respondents on initial contact. It was explained to them that participation in the study was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences, assured anonymity, and provided instructions for the return of the instrument to the research assistants. To protect the identity of the respondents, their positions and real names are not used throughout this discourse.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Of the distributed questionnaires, one hundred and twenty-five were returned. After data cleaning was conducted on the dataset, it was realized that five (5) questionnaires contained a significant amount of missing data. These questionnaires were eliminated from the sample as they were considered incomplete. Therefore, the usable returned questionnaires amounted to one hundred and twenty (n=120) or a response rate of forty per cent (40%). While a higher response rate was desired, this was deemed to be acceptable for research of this nature and consistent with research of a similar nature (see Crumps Jr., 2009). The data indicated that school violence in the Caribbean has a variety of impacts

as the educators reported (1) individual impacts (perpetrator and the victim(s)), (2) institutional (schools) impacts, and (3) social milieus/communal impacts. Based on the collective views gleaned from Caribbean educators, the impacts of school violence are framed in terms of the three main impacts that emanated from the dataset. It is submitted that the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies can be better understood from the explanations associated with the 'Circle of School Violence' which is later highlighted at figure 1. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively low number of respondents (n=120), the researcher found it academically prudent to present the data as one body of data rather than distilling the data by individual jurisdictions.

### **Institutional**

From an institutional perspective, the findings emanating from the data on school violence indicate that a major impact of school violence is that it causes damage to the reputation of the schools involved. Fifty-five per cent (55%) of the respondents (n=120) were of the view that violence at schools also interferes with the learning/educational process as it ruins the school environment by creating unnecessary tension and disturbing the smooth running of studies and other school activities. This was a consistent theme in the discussion of the impact of school violence in the Caribbean and an anonymous secondary school teacher from St. Lucia (2014) succinctly summed up the problem in the following manner - *"the tension created by school violence tends to distract students from concentrating on their studies."* This position is supported in the international literature by Goldstein, Young, & Boyd (2008) and James et al. (2014). 82% of the respondents also indicated that for teachers, incidents of victimization by students at school affected their well-being and quality of life and that this may lead to teacher disengagement, transfers to safer schools and/or migration from the profession altogether. This view is consistent with that of Karcher (2002), Smith & Smith (2006), Janosz et al. (2004) as well as by Adla (2007, p. 2) who noted that the school violence "may encourage them [teachers] to seek safer work environments." The data indicated that another impact of school violence is the propensity for the wastage of resources on security and discipline, when those scarce resources could be better utilized for the benefit of the students themselves. The data also revealed that violence at schools has the propensity to create fear and disorder among students and teachers alike. This view was almost unanimously proffered by the research participants.

### **Individual**

The research data showed that there are negative impacts for individuals (perpetrators and victims) involved in the heinous acts of school violence. Seventy-seven per cent (77%) of the teachers surveyed felt that violence at schools in the Caribbean has the tendency to hinder student's ability to concentrate on their studies and as a result, they tend to perform worse academically than they otherwise would have. This position is consistent with findings of Burton (2012)

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

(as cited in Netshitangani, 2014, p. 1658) who points out that children and youth who experienced violence are likely to show a clear decline in academic performance. Further, the RTI (2013, p. 1) points out that “There is an association between the safety of schools in developing countries and educational achievement measured in standardized tests.” Continuing, it was also posited that “Research from developing and developed countries indicates that school violence affects educational achievement through diverse causal pathways (RTI, 2013, p. 2). The findings from the data also indicated that other impacts for children of school age in the Caribbean due to violence at schools include feelings of loneliness, depression, and adjustment difficulties, poor academic performance dropping out of school, truancy, violent behaviors and the inability to function efficiently at school. This finding complements research by Pinheiro (2006) and King (2014).

Eighty-three per cent (83%) of the respondents proffered the view that school violence acts as a deterrent to children attending school, whether on their own or on their parents volition. This finding complements research by Plan International (2008) which reported that an impact of school violence is that it tends to discourage children from attending school as well as discourages parents from sending their children to school. It therefore becomes difficult for parents to enroll their children in affected schools for the fear that their children may be involved in school violence, get hurt by violence or be unfairly stigmatized. For school children who remain in the violent school environment, they tend to suffer difficulty from a lack of concentration and are distracted. Further, children who study in a violent environment achieve lower academic results than those who do not (Pereznieto et al., 2010, p. vi).

Eighty per cent (80%) of the respondents proffered the view that violence at schools impacts the physical, psychological and health well-being of students. This position has found support from (Pinheiro, 2006, p. 128), who submits that “The psychological impacts may include immediate impairment of emotional development and long-term mental distress and ill-health, which can contribute to physical ill-health as well.” Indeed, the growing empirical literature on violence at schools points out that there are impacts for both perpetrators and victims of school violence (decreased self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, reduced school attendance, lower class participation, lower educational attainment, pain, suicide, violent retaliation, damage and humiliation, thereby affecting their learning, development and future (Lall, 2013; Eljach, 2011).

### **Communal**

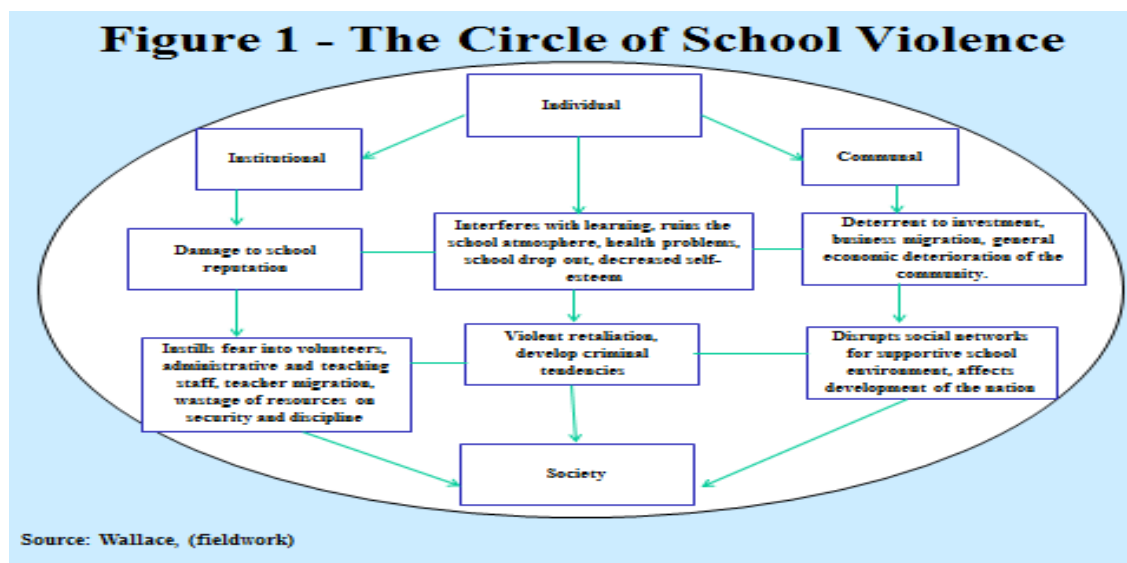
In the community context, the incidence of school violence has impacts for the immediate school community and this was clearly evinced from the data findings. The results indicated that school violence negatively affects the surrounding community (Robers et al., 2013) and neighbourhood cohesion (Adla, 2007) as local businesses (shops, small groceries etc.) are often forced to close their businesses or leave the community due to the unattractiveness of the community. This viewpoint on the negative impacts of school violence on the surrounding school



community was shared by sixty-one per cent (61%) of the respondents. The data also revealed that school violence “*may deter future investments into the immediate school community by business people*” (Secondary School principal, Jamaica 2014) which can lead to the general economic deterioration of the community. The aforementioned position has also been echoed by Perezniето et al. (2010, p. vii) who postulate that “School violence can also be a deterrent to investment within the community where the violence is prevalent. This can lead to a general economic deterioration of such communities.” School violence also has negative impacts for the immediate community of the school locale as it disrupts the social networks which are necessary for a supportive school environment and social capital in the immediate school community (see Perezniето et al., 2010, p. vi).

### The Circle of School Violence

The results from the data were categorized as institutional, individuals, and community and add an important piece to the gap on school violence as viewed through educator’s lens. The findings complement the research in the international arena that consistently shows negative impacts of school violence on individuals, schools and communities (Adla, 2007; Burton & Leoschut, 2012; King, 2014), while extending the limited literature on the impacts of school violence on societies in the Caribbean. Based on the study’s findings, a conceptual model was created to assist with an understanding of the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model - the ‘Circle of School Violence’.

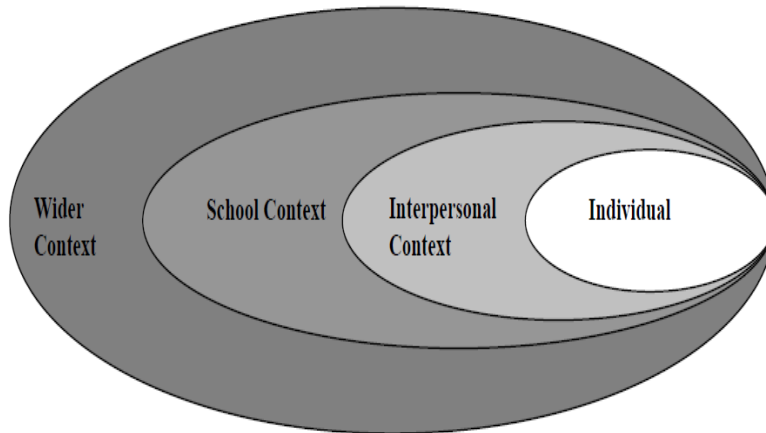


The impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies (illustrated above at Figure 1) is supported by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) via the bio-ecological model for understanding the prevention of school violence

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

(Figure 2 below). Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) using the bio-ecological model for understanding the prevention of school violence, point out that school violence is generated and felt in the economic, cultural, school and individual contexts.

**Figure 2 - Bio-ecological model for understanding the prevention of school violence**



**Source:** Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) (Adapted from World Health Organization, (2002)).

As the data and analysis represented only six Caribbean islands and the views of one hundred and twenty (120) teachers, the results should serve to further the discussion on this important topic. The results may be used to evaluate violence at schools in other Caribbean islands, however, additional analysis of similar data would provide greater synthesis. The impacts of school violence as viewed by Caribbean educators demonstrate the urgent need for multifaceted approaches from different sectors of Caribbean societies. Strategies which are recognized as global best practices must be implemented to minimize the impact of school violence. These interventions must be developmentally appropriate, participatory, comprehensive and longer term, and must take cognizance of the deleterious impacts of school violence. Such interventions must include the development of context-specific codes of behavior for schools and school students; conflict resolution training and investments in child protection systems beyond the reach of schools. There must also be the creation of legal frameworks and public policies both within and outside the education sector to deal with school violence. There must also be the creation of a toolkit of didactic tools to act as a supplement to the legal framework. Finally, such intervention strategies must integrate violence-related issues in all teacher training programs.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are policy implications for Caribbean school administrators, teachers and legislators as a result of the impacts of school violence as Caribbean educators are apparently unable to deal with it (Belle, 2006). A consensus position emanating

from the research was that since the removal of corporal punishment from the diet of punishments available to teachers in schools in the Caribbean, via regional governments signing onto the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), 'discipline at schools is in a bad state' as teachers now cannot physically discipline errant students. Additionally, the position of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was strengthened by the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment: 8 (2006) which stated inter alia "the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment." With this in mind, Caribbean educationists must seek alternative methods to corporal punishment for ill-disciplined students which may have more positive long term outcomes. These alternatives include, but are not limited to having students write a statement describing the negative effects of their behavior or to apologize for the mistakes in front of their classmates (Busienei, 2012, p. 158). Other viable alternatives include the use of positive discipline (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008), positive reinforcement, (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.), withdrawal of privileges (Gichuru, 2004), guidance and counselling, requiring the ill-disciplined student(s) to sit at the back of the classroom and to think about their mistakes and of ways to improve their behaviour, assigning the students non-abusive physical tasks such as performing light chores or fixing what they have broken (Human Rights Watch, 1999) and/or home contact (sending the errant child home to fetch their parent(s)) (Diamantes, 1992).

Another common thread emanating from the data was that students are aware that corporal punishment has been banned in schools and that disciplinary measures available to teachers are now 'very limited'. The available punishments are restricted to warnings as well as in and out of school suspensions, which many teachers view "*as ineffective at best*" (Anonymous primary school teachers, Barbados; Anonymous secondary school teachers – St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago). This has implications for teaching training in the Caribbean. Indeed, this author suggests that there must now be enhanced in-service teacher training on school violence to encourage educators in the region to use alternative methods of discipline without recourse to physical sanctions (see Human Rights Watch, 1999).

The findings emanating from the study on the impact of school violence in the Caribbean also has implications for policy makers in the Caribbean as the results indicated several negative impacts ranging from individual to institutional and communal impacts. Assuming that the views of the respondents are correct that '*discipline at schools is in a bad state*', that current disciplinary measures within Caribbean schools are '*very limited*' and that the present system of disciplining students is '*ineffective at best*', then there should be some new, novel or creative ways to discipline errant students. For example, withdrawal from favourite activities and imposition of fines, (Ajowi & Omboto, 2013, p. 129), conduct of school welfare duties such as cleaning blackboards, removing graffiti from walls, maintenance of notice boards etc., rewards and self-commitment in writing to

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

maintain good conduct may be useful disciplinary tools as alternatives to corporal punishment. Additionally, schemes such as 'positive role modelling' can be used to promote good behavior and to inculcate desirable values among students as well as to develop student's sense of responsibility for their own development. Experiential learning and model student programs can also be used as novel ways to address school based violence in the Caribbean. As children are the pillar of a nation, educating them in a violence free environment is a must. As such, the problem of school violence must be addressed by all stake holders in the Caribbean including parents, teachers, schools, school administrators and the respective Ministries of Education.

It is imperative that long term solutions to school violence and its impacts are found so that a peaceful and conducive atmosphere of learning returns and permeates Caribbean schools. This is a prerequisite if school age Caribbean children are to acquire a high quality education and become responsible members of their societies. Therefore, policy makers in the Caribbean must now take measured steps aimed at preventing and reducing the incidence of school violence. Students, parents, teachers, other adults and school authorities should now cooperate to eliminate school violence and immediate action must also be taken to negate its impacts. The aforementioned can be accomplished via the creation of programs aimed solely at school violence within the larger context of education. School violence is not immutable and while the Caribbean faces serious challenges from school violence and its impacts, informed policies at the national and regional levels can make a significant difference. With this in mind, there is a dire need for a policy position on 'disciplining school students' in the Caribbean so that the eventual impacts of school violence may be reduced.

### **STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study has several strengths; however, it is not without weaknesses. A major strength of this exploratory study is the randomness of selection of the respondents which should serve to offset the small sample size and generalizability issues. Second, the study addresses a notable lacuna in the literature and contributes to academia by expanding the knowledge base on the topic. Third, the study serves as a medium for sending a message to policy makers regarding the need for effective policies to deal with school violence in the Caribbean (teacher training, discipline management etc.) as well as acting as a base for future research.

Despite its obvious strengths, there are limitations to this study that should be considered when evaluating the results of the analysis. First, the study is limited by its small sample size (n=120). This was a function of inadequacy of the timing of the data collection exercise as the data collection was conducted in December and this period coincides with the start of end of term examinations, end of the school term and the start of the December school vacation in the Caribbean. This made data collection from teachers very tedious and the results of the study must therefore be taken with caution. Another weakness of this study is that the data measured the perceptions of educators at different schools (rural, urban,

government, private, government assisted) and did not consider a comparison of educators working at schools of a similar nature. Indeed, it would have been interesting to determine whether the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies as measured via educator's perceptions were the same for all typologies of schools. Additionally, the voice of students and male participants (educators) were lost as students were not part of the study and the participants were mainly female. Therefore, the information revealed may reflect a dominant female perspective. Furthermore, it would have been useful to consider student's perspectives in a comparative context to their educators. In light of the foregoing, future research on school violence in the Caribbean should be conducted using a larger sample to further explore educator's perceptions of the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies as this would provide a more complete evaluation of the problem.

In spite of the study's limitation, this research effort is still very useful as it can assist Caribbean legislators, educators, parents, students and other stakeholders in understanding the long reaches of school violence. The research can also be useful in informing policies for violence prevention at schools as well as highlighting the necessity for teacher training in handling violence at schools in the Caribbean. Finally, the study adds to the existing body of knowledge on the subject area from the perspective of the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies based on teachers' perceptions, an area hitherto un-researched. The author submits that the present cross-Caribbean approach to the study appears to be the first of its kind in the region, and that despite its obvious limitations, the study is important as it represents the first regional effort to examine the impact and not causes or contexts of school violence, whilst using educators as proxies for the research. The study also offers some synthesis of sparse literature in support of the notion that the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies based on educator's perceptions should receive more scholarly attention.

#### **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

As this is an exploratory study, the focus was limited to a general assessment of teacher perceptions of the impact of school violence on societies in the Caribbean. While several interesting answers emanated from the research, there are still some unanswered questions and potential research angles, making further research necessary. Instructively, a key voice and an instrumental participant in school violence – school children- is noticeably silent in the study. This was a function of the timing of the research as explained earlier and it is submitted that future research on this topic should seek to incorporate their views. Second, the findings of the study, while seemingly supported by the international literature, need to be confirmed in other Caribbean-wide analyses of the impact of school violence. Third, as the study utilised a relatively small sample, a similar study should be conducted using a larger sample.

## ***Impacts of School Violence on Caribbean Societies by Wallace and Rosales***

### **CONCLUSION**

Hitherto, knowledge transfer on the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies as viewed through Caribbean educator's lens was absent. From the analysis presented, several types of impacts of school violence including individual, institutional (school) and communal impacts were observed. Therefore, the analysis of educator's perceptions of the impact of school violence on Caribbean societies provides a valuable approximation of the problem and points to negative impacts on individuals, schools and communities, even though data limitations prevent the author from estimating the financial costs of these impacts in a meaningful way. Broadly speaking, the results of this study suggest that the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies are too consequentially grave to stand idly by and do nothing "as the price of inaction is costly" (UNESCO, 2011, p. 5). Added to this, there is no room for institutional inertia on behalf of the present status quo, otherwise that status quo may quickly disappear and be replaced by that of violence at schools as part of the socio-politico landscape of schools in the Caribbean. To conclude, the findings of this study are of great theoretical importance as they increase our knowledge concerning the impacts of school violence on Caribbean societies and while there is no panacea to the challenge of school violence or its impacts, it poses a serious threat to the attainment of Education for All in the Caribbean.

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