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***Patriarchy, gender inequality and
culture: colliding dynamics in the
construction of child sexual abuse in
the Caribbean***

http://www.stopitnow.com/caribbean_research_webcast_archivefield,

UK

August 3, 2010

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Study of child sexual abuse in the Eastern Caribbean:

- **Commissioned by UNICEF**
- **Partially funded by DfID**
- **Carried out by the University of Huddersfield, UK and Action for Children during 2008/2009**
- **In partnership with the governments of six Caribbean countries: Anguilla, Dominica, Barbados, Grenada, St. Kitts/Nevis and Montserrat (collectively representative of the region)**

Context:

There are few empirical studies of child sexual abuse in the region however from the studies that *do* exist we know that CSA is a serious problem:

- *Commercial sexual exploitation is a growing problem (IOM, 2005).*
- *Child abuse is a problem in both Latin America and the Caribbean (PAHO, 2001).*
- *42.8% of Caribbean children who were sexually active had their first sexual intercourse before the age of 10. Many- (47.6% females and 31.9% males) said this was forced or coerced (WHO 2000)*
- *Sexual abuse and exploitation is one of the more common types of abuse in the Caribbean (PAHO, 2001).*

Aims and Methods:

Study of perceptions, attitudes and opinions about child sexual abuse – part of a regional programme to tackle gender-based violence

- Multiple mixed methods (survey, interviews, focus groups)
- Wide-ranging –Caribbean researchers working in six countries gathered information from over 1,400 men and women from all social backgrounds and levels of education

Presentation

In order to examine the role of patriarchy, culture and gender inequality in CSA, this presentation focuses on six findings:

1. *Intrafamilial Abuse*
2. *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*
3. *Constructions of Childhood*
4. *The Role of Women*
5. *Blame Attribution*
6. *Sexual Initiation as a 'right of passage'*

explores the issues that arise by referring to other studies

Why focus on patriarchy?

Patriarchy as a dominant system in the Caribbean (and the world) informs contemporary culture, but this culture also feeds back into and sustains patriarchy.

Patriarchy in itself does not promote CSA, it is the abuse of male authority and power as sanctioned by social and cultural practices (silence, institutional complicity, lax law enforcement, historical and ideological gender identities and so on) that sustains CSA. The abuse of patriarchy then, is what contributes to CSA.

Note: many Caribbean men use their power and

FINDINGS -1

Intra-familial Abuse

Most child sexual abuse takes place in the home within the family

- Secretive, invisible, silenced
- Often multiple victims within a household
- Main perpetrators said to be step-fathers, mothers' boyfriends, biological fathers

Gender roles and family life

- **Caribbean women bear major responsibility for meeting needs of the family. Not only single female-headed households but common among other family types (Durant-Gonzalez, 1982, Barrow 2005).**
- **No equivalent shift in women's status. Men often assigned or assume the title of 'head' whether or not they perform major roles within the family (St. Bernard 1997). Values based on male dominance remain intact (Moses, 2001).**
- **Sex and violence tightly woven in constructions of masculinity and patriarchy – played out within the context of family relations. (Quamina-Aiyejina and Brathwaite 2005).**
- **Fine line between sexual violence against women and sexual violence against children.**
- **Gender inequality and women's economic dependence on men force many women and children into vulnerable**

Thus unequal gender relations are both causes and consequences of sexual abuse with gender relations shaping sexual behaviour, social attitudes, and vulnerability. These processes are historically contexted, mediated by socio-economic status and sanctioned through social practices.

Mother's boyfriends- considered particularly risky

- **High proportion of female headed households, (e.g. in Barbados 44.4% households in 2006 were single female-headed (Barbados Statistical Service 2006)**
- **Gender-based poverty**
- **Multiple/serial partnering**
- **Dependence on men for economic survival**

The boyfriend often contributes to the family's household income- this buys him 'sexual rights'



FINDINGS - 2

The following forms of CSEC were identified as particular problems

- *Interfamilial Pimping*
- *Forms of ICT-based exploitation (internet and cell phones)*
- *Transactional sex abuse*
- *Transactional sex among young people*
- *Child sex tourism – a growing problem*

Transactional child sexual abuse is extremely common

Transactional child sexual abuse is the sexual abuse of a minor (usually by an adult male) which involves the exchange of money, goods, or favours in return for sex

An Open Secret

- Often happens with the full knowledge of parents, communities and officials.
- A firmly entrenched and established pattern of behaviour that does not need to be hidden since it is very common and is considered unlikely to attract penalty or even disapproval.

This is culture being influenced by patriarchy but also by a myriad of other factors like institutional complacency and ineptness

Key features of TSA

- TSA committed by men at all levels of society, including politicians and senior professionals.
- Primarily older men and teenage girls
- Increasingly boys are involved
- Isolated examples of women targeting young girls and boys
- Transactional sex 'normalised' – evidence of young people mirroring adult behaviour and being socialised in the 'acceptability' of transactional sex exchange. Young girls frequently engage in transactional sex with boys
- Transactional sex exchange not only to do with meeting basic economic needs, linked to growth of materialism and commodification of sex
- Poverty creates a risky environment for TSA, but there are lots of poor households in which CSA does not occur.

What the literature says: social environment for CSEC

The Caribbean has many of the negative social and economic characteristics generally associated with CSEC, (high unemployment rates, poor levels of education in deprived communities, social class & gender inequalities and social deprivation (UNICEF, 2007).

Sexual economic exchange - long history in the region. The basis of colonial relations in many instances (Young 1995). A number of forms of sexual economic exchange exist:

- commercial sex work (or prostitution)
- romance or sex with tourists
- ‘sponsoring’
- ‘sugar daddy’ and ‘sugar mommy’ relationships, and ‘outside’ relations.

“Transactional sex” ... is one form that appears to be on the rise in the twentieth century (Dunn 2001; Kempadoo and Dunn 2001; Ahmed 2003; Barrow 2005, Phillips 2002, Phillips 2006).

3/0
Some evidence of organised child prostitution

TSA- focus group participants:

“... a lot of older men are taking advantage of our little boys, they are very young children aged 13-14 years being paid to have sex and then the child walks away to buy a pair of shoes or something else”

“Bus drivers and persons with vehicles use young girls a lot. Particularly young girls going to school who can't afford to pay for bus fare. They trade in transportation for sex”

“Man bulling little boys. These boys getting sex for shoes and Ipods...Some older boys bulling to get work”

The feminization of poverty along with the increasing commodification of all aspects of social life, including sex, underpins many of these [CSEC] arrangements, and makes women and girls' (and boys') sexuality vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Quamina-Aiyejina and Brathwaite, 2005).

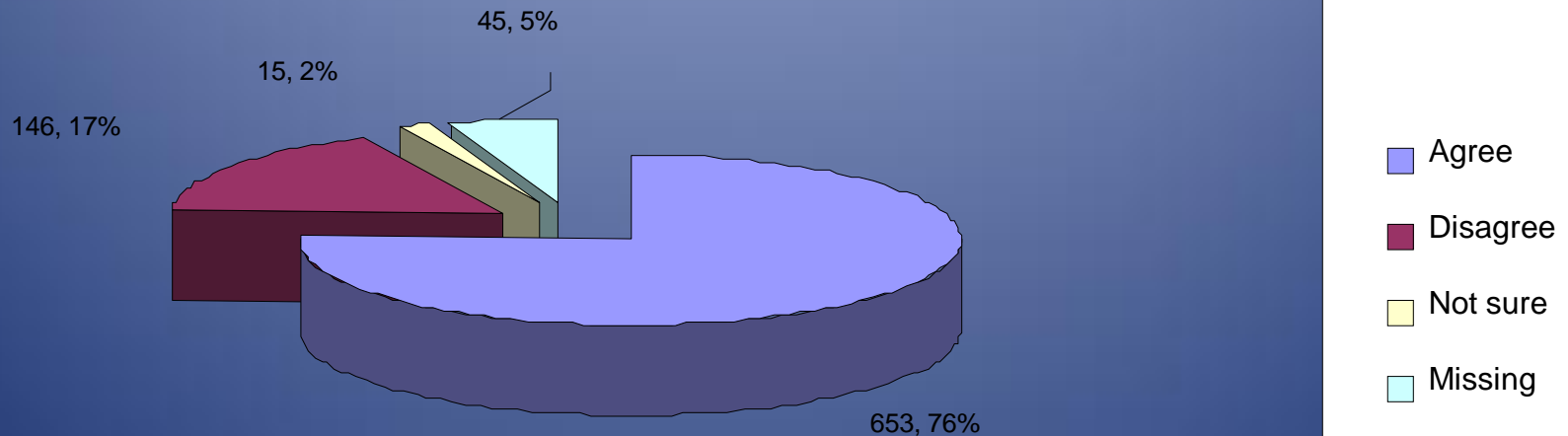
We need to engage in pro-active dialogue to de-normalise transactional sex

FINDINGS- 3

CSA linked to how childhood is viewed

Sexual activity between adults and children is never OK no matter what

Not everyone thinks so...



19% of people did not agree with the statement above

Patriarchy and constructions of childhood in manifestations of CSA

Embedded within systems of patriarchy and male domination are constructions of childhood and sexual-role belief attribution through which girls are perceived as objects of sexual desire that should be available to men – especially once they reach puberty (Quas, et al. 2002).

FINDINGS

Male focus group respondents:

“The bible says that when a woman goes through puberty she is ready, so if it happens at 11 she is ready”

“Anything after 12 is lunch”

“Once they’re sitting on the toilet and feet touch the ground they are ready”

“...the case is that men have the inner tendency of finding girls sexually accessible once they have passed puberty”

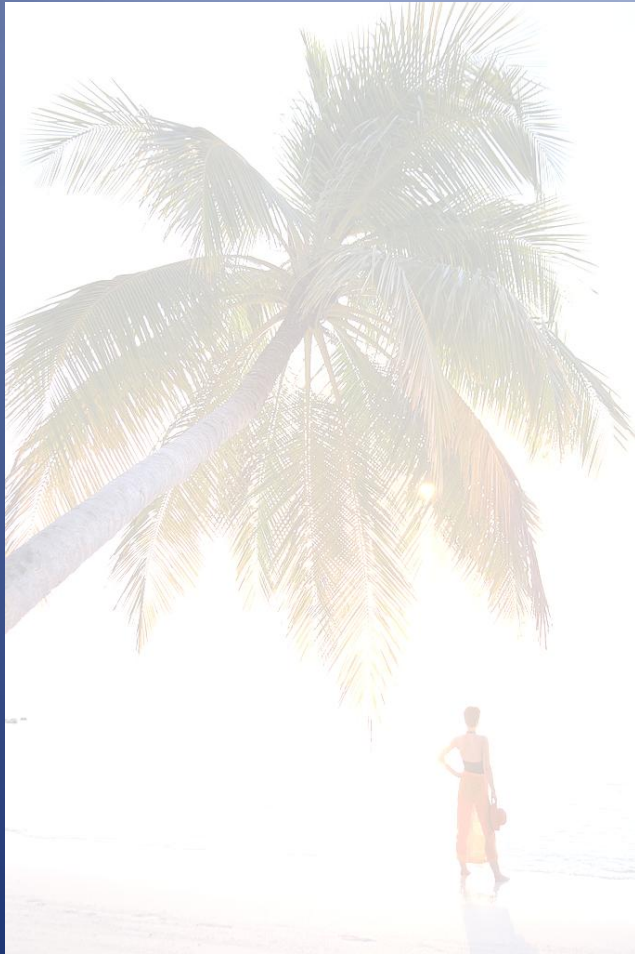
FINDINGS- 4

Role of some women...

- **Failing to protect children**
- **Disbelieving the child**
- **Putting male partners first**
- **Minimising the harm done**
- **Physically abusing children who disclose**
- **Allowing daughters to have sex with older men for material gain**
- **Accepting “pay-offs” to prevent cases going to court**



Why are some women complicit...



- The economic power of men in relation to many women
- Male authority in sexual decision making
- Patriarchal values that privilege men's rights of entitlement over the rights of women and children
- Assumptions about men's sexual 'rights'
- Gender-based violence

A woman whose husband is abusing her child and keeps quiet or whose daughter is having sex with an older man in order to bring in income and allows it may have simply chosen survival over other options that she may not have the courage or support to face. If these women were abused themselves as children, they may have learned that keeping quiet or 'allowing it' is the only way to survive. As one interviewee said:

“What safety nets do we have to support women who stand up against the abuse of men? We didn't have the safety nets to protect them from abuse when they were children, and we don't have the safety nets to help them protect their own children”.

FINDINGS – 5

Feminised blame attribution

- Women were heavily vilified and blamed for '*allowing*' men to sexual abuse children
- 51% of female survey respondents and 48% of male respondents either think that women who refuse partners sex is a contributing factor to men having sex with children or are not sure
- Dominant perception that men are weak and easily tempted and thus perhaps not able to control themselves.
- Blame attribution directed towards teenage girls – 'teenage girls being regarded as 'hot' and thus responsible for enticing men'

Focus group responses

- Male FGs suggested that inappropriate dressing of girls was part of the problem, and that they and their mothers were culpable for some of the advances made on them when they are dressed as if they are “*big women*”.
- Some women also blamed girls - “*girls invite negative attention because of their attire and because they do not say ‘stop’ or ‘no’ forcefully enough*”.

What the literature says: patriarchy, gender roles and blame attribution

- Socio/cultural expectations about '*good mothering*' may account for blame being directed to women who are unable to protect their children. Caring for children is perceived as '*natural*' to all women and motherhood is a pivotal signifier of womanhood in the Caribbean (Mohammed and Perkins 1999).
- In examining factors that contribute to who is blamed for child sexual abuse, Back and Lips (1998) show that blame attribution tends to be along gender lines
- Victim-blaming is a common response (Taylor and Lloyd 2001)

FINDINGS - 6

Sexual Initiation as Rite of Passage

- Sexual abuse of boys perceived as providing a ‘harmless’ sexual induction to manhood - treated less seriously than female CSA (despite evidence of similar effects). This together with homophobia made it even more difficult (than for girls) for boys to disclose:

“If I [as a little boy] go and say that a big man abused me, I can never walk straight in [name of village] again” (Interviewee)

- Sexual initiation of girls viewed as a passage to ‘womanhood’ - some fathers/step-fathers think it their right to be the first to have sex with their daughter:

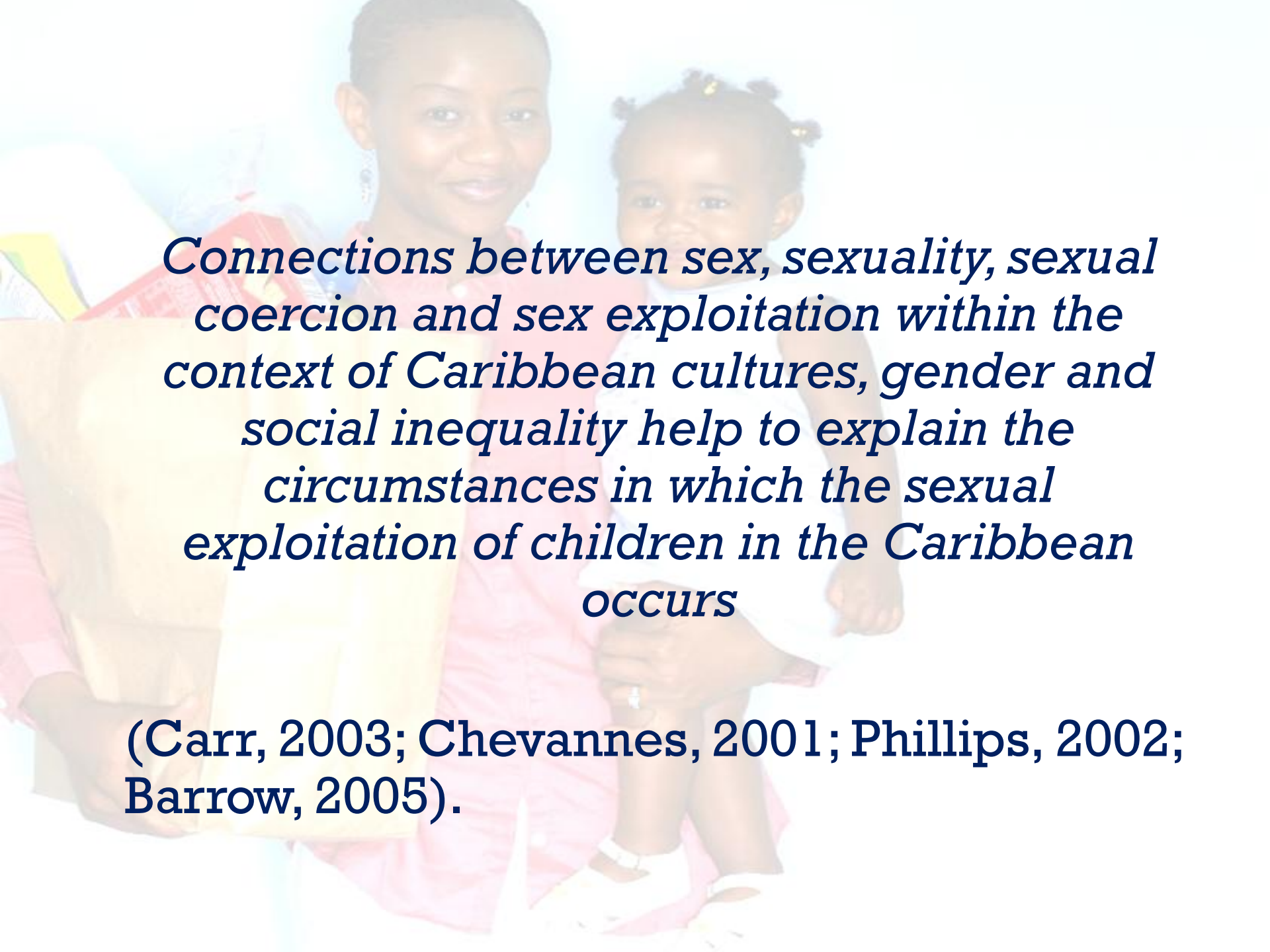
“The men, they the ones feeding and clothing the girls, so it gives them permission to “make the way first” (Male focus group participant).

Explanations? - what the literature says:

- Sexual prowess is a primary signifier of masculinity and desirability a signifier of femininity and are central to contemporary definitions of Caribbean identity (Reddock, 2004)
- Adult male heterosexual desire is commonly celebrated in popular culture and promoted in everyday life (Chevannes, 2001)
- Some adolescent girls have adopted a subculture centered on active and assertive female heterosexuality (Barrow 2005). Running alongside this are deep moral, religious and cultural taboos about sex (CARICOM 1999) and social institutions (family, school and church) that alternately denies and sanction their sexuality (Barrow 2005).
- Cultural glorification of sexual initiation is commonplace

Interlocking Factors





Connections between sex, sexuality, sexual coercion and sex exploitation within the context of Caribbean cultures, gender and social inequality help to explain the circumstances in which the sexual exploitation of children in the Caribbean occurs

(Carr, 2003; Chevannes, 2001; Phillips, 2002; Barrow, 2005).

Gender Socialisation



How we teach boys to be men and girls to be women
Perpetuation of gender inequality male privilege

www.unicef.org/barbados

Thank You

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