

Survey shows Guyanese generally accept Domestic Violence

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As local human rights groups continue to advocate for equality amongst the genders, a recent international survey has shown that acceptance of domestic violence in Guyana is relatively high.

The Americas Barometer survey has been conducting interviews with thousands of Guyanese over the past few years with focus on democratic values and behaviours in the Americas.



Margaret Kertzious of the Guyana Help and Shelter

During a revelation of the findings late last week, Dr. Elizabeth Zechmeister of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) said the survey showed domestic violence is relatively accepted in Guyana.

During interviews carried out between 2006 and 2014, respondents were asked whether they would or would not approve of a man hitting his wife if she had been unfaithful. They were also asked whether they would not approve but understand the abuse.

According to the survey, 10.2% of respondents approved while 25.4% of respondents did not approve of the abuse but understood. Further, 64.4% of respondents neither approved nor understood the abuse.

Zechmeister said the responses indicated a relatively high level of acceptance, especially when compared to other countries in the Americas. The data showed that Guyana was ranked third with 35.6% in interviewed countries on the acceptance of domestic violence. Ranked just above Guyana was El Salvador at 42.1% while Guatemala was ranked highest at 58%.

Margaret Kertzious, Coordinator of the Guyana Help and Shelter said the results of the survey were not surprising as domestic violence is perceived to be a normal activity in the Guyanese culture. She noted that persons were constantly seen fighting, even on the streets, and she deemed the society an abusive one. She said too that persons who lived overseas and who interacted with her would constantly ponder why abuse was so accepted in Guyana.

Further, she said, domestic violence was so pervasive that most Guyanese children were already aware or had experienced it in their lives.



Elizabeth Zechmeister of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)

Kertzious said that the Help and Shelter would conduct exercises in schools and, after explaining what domestic violence was, children would indicate their experiences with abuse.

"We work in the schools and this is what we're seeing; for the children, it's a normal thing in their homes," Kertzious said.

Although Kertzious said the findings were not surprising, she emphasised that something needed to be done to address the issue of domestic violence. She noted that families needed to be tackled to better deal with the abuse.

She said too that domestic violence needed to be seen as wrong, regardless of the actions of women.

She said that studies had shown that many persons believe women who are unfaithful and are subsequently beaten "deserve the licks".

"In many societies, women aren't the victims if they had been unfaithful. It's the norm in our society that the man can go out and be unfaithful but the woman can't do the same without being beaten down for it," she said.

Kertzious explained that Help and Shelter is working towards teaching women to stop the abuse in its tracks when it is first exhibited.

"Young women are now learning to stop the abuse right away but that idea still needs to be infiltrated into other sections of our society. People don't want to talk about these things but they're happening," Kertzious said.

The Americas Barometer survey is conducted by LAPOP in more than 20 countries, including all of North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

The survey focuses on at least 1,500 voting aged persons in each country each year.

The Americas Barometer survey is carried out every two years, and in 2014 more than 50,000 persons were interviewed.