



*Elsa Leo-Rhynie*

# THE Jamaican FAMILY



**Continuity**

**& Change**

GRACE, KENNEDY FOUNDATION LECTURE 1993



**Dr. Elsa Leo-Rhynie**  
**Professor of Woman and Development Studies, UWI**

Many thoughtful persons in trying to understand the people of Jamaica and indeed of the Caribbean soon encounter a puzzling paradox.

On one hand our small population can always produce a dazzling array of talented men and women who, when put on their mettle, compete effectively in many fields with the best in the world.

Yet, on the other hand, much of the persistent failure to realize the obvious potential in our societies can be traced as much to human and attitudinal factors as to material and other resource deficiencies.

This puzzle would seem to suggest that analyses of developmental problems must pay much more attention to the human psychological and sociological factors rather than maintain the preponderant attention heretofore given to material and economic factors.

The Grace, Kennedy Foundation Lecture, therefore, last year spoke to the question of Morality and Community in examining the role of ethics and principles in our way of doing things.

This year, we focus on the foundation of our society, namely, the family.

Again we are fortunate in the person we have been able to attract as our Lecturer. Dr. Elsa Leo-Rhynie, a distinguished Jamaican scholar and educator, is Professor and Regional Coordinator of Women & Development Studies at the University of the West Indies.

She arrived at that post via the route of high school teacher, Lecturer in the UWI Department of Education and Executive Director of the prestigious Institute of Management & Production (IMP). Most importantly, Dr. Leo-Rhynie is a happily married mother of three.

We are pleased to present Dr Leo-Rhynie's insightful Lecture and encourage its widest dissemination as a basic contribution to a necessary national debate on 'The Jamaican Family: Continuity and Change'.

*Rev C. Samuel Reid*  
*Director - Grace, Kennedy Foundation*  
*Chairman, GKF Lecture Committee*

## **Introduction**

*Because the family is potentially the source of the greatest good, it is also, in equal proportion, potentially the source of the greatest damage. Ideally the family is the major provider of support, warmth, comfort, protection and so forth. But when the family falls short in these provisions, suffering can be acute and disturbances in development may result.*

Lilian G. Katz

The last decades of the twentieth century have been characterized by rapid, complex and often confusing change - change in how things are perceived, how things are done, what things are valued, what things persist. This rapid change has created uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict in the minds of people who have been prepared for a world in which changes occurred at a pace, which made life fairly stable and predictable.

The changes, which have to be faced today have generated many controversial issues, challenged existing values, spawned new survival strategies and coping behaviours. They demand that individuals be more flexible, more adaptable and more resilient. As the Rev. Burchel Taylor pointed out in his Grace, Kennedy Lecture last year, much of the change has been accompanied by behaviours which are viewed negatively by the society at large. Many Jamaicans protest against the in-discipline in our society, the violence, the lack of moral values, the emergence of a 'me' generation whose members ignore the rights and feelings of others and who have little or no social conscience. Such individuals are seen as being responsible for creating what Burchel Taylor describes as a subculture of flagrant materialism, where money and property are the ultimate determinants of all values.

These patterns of behaviour are symptoms of a level of social instability, which threatens family and community life and, indeed,

the whole fabric of Jamaican society. It is, however, true to say that a wide spectrum of change agents, including the rapid pace of technological invention with all its implications, has contributed to instability not only in Jamaica but also throughout the world. The paradox is that while much of this social instability has been attributed to the breakdown of traditional institutions, especially the home and family, these same institutions are increasingly being called upon to be the major restabilizing influences.

The family is the institution, which has the responsibility for replacing the population. It is the source of status held by individuals within the society by virtue of characteristics, such as gender and social class, which are assumed at birth. In pre-modern, traditional societies, the family was not only the social core unit, but also the basic unit in the economy. The family had total responsibility for organizing the work related to feeding and maintaining the household, educating the children and caring for the elderly. Industrialization changed this, removing many of the functions of the family. Work was shifted from the home base to the factory, education of the children was provided by schools and, ultimately, the care of the elderly became largely the responsibility of the state.

By the mid-twentieth century, in many societies, parents were no longer solely responsible for the socialization of their children. Professional providers - teachers, ministers of religion, doctors, nurses, community workers, counselors, sports coaches, youth leaders, psychologists - all became part of the socialization process and at the same time weakened, to some degree, the ties between parents and children. As the family unit became smaller, it became a highly specialized institution, providing emotional support and refuge from an impersonal and increasingly competitive world, while still retaining some responsibility for passing on to the new generation the attitudes, values and traditions necessary for continuity in the society. Today, however, the competence of

parents to raise their children to be responsible citizens is frequently questioned while increased involvement of community and society in this task is often advocated. The recent case in the United States of America, where a child was allowed to divorce his natural parents and select the family group within which he wanted to grow and develop signals another shift in the way in which some families will be constituted and will operate in the future.

In recognition of the importance of family, and its continuity in the face of change, the United Nations has designated 1994 the Year of the Family. In anticipation of this, I wish here to examine the structure and function of the family in Jamaican society, the factors, which threaten its stability and influence, and the prospects for its future.

## **Jamaican Family Patterns**

Within the Jamaican society, marital practices and the resulting family patterns vary, and these variations have been the subject of much study. In some sectors of society, marriage - a legal contract - represents the transition of man and woman to a new relationship in which it is expected that an environment will be created for the bearing of children and the development of a family. This is the nuclear family pattern, described by Fernando Henriques in *Family and Colour in Jamaica* (1953) as 'the paternalistic, monogamous, Christian family'.

Although the nuclear family remains the social and religious ideal for all social classes in Jamaica, it exists mainly in the upper and middle classes of the society as a whole, and in all classes of some ethnic groups such as the Chinese and East Indian. Among the lower classes, both legal and non-legal sexual unions are established. The latter are often very informal. In some cases, the male partner does not share a residence with the female partner.

A three-point classification developed by George Roberts and Sonja Sinclair in 1978 is now recognized by demographers and is widely used to describe the existing patterns. The categories are:

1. Married: man and woman legally united and sharing the same residence.
2. Common-law: man and woman not legally united, but sharing a sexual union and a common residence.
3. Visiting: man and woman sharing sexual relationship but not legally united nor sharing a common residence.

These categories not only describe the union states but also, as Roberts and Sinclair point out, represent the three stages of the mating pattern evident among many families in Jamaica. The first ten years of the family cycle (women up to twenty-five years of

age) are characterized by visiting unions, then there is a gradual transition to common-law and/or legal union so that by the age of forty-five most women are involved in either common-law or marital unions.

Over the past 150 years, the legal marriage rate in Jamaica has increased somewhat, but Roberts and Sinclair comment on the stability in family patterns and forms since Emancipation despite the many economic, political and social changes, which have transformed the Jamaican society. This lack of change and the persistence of varying family patterns have been of great interest to anthropologists and researchers for many years. The unique features of family organizations, which have been explored, include:

- \* the dominant role of women in households
- \* the marginality and irresponsibility of men
- \* the high incidence of children born out of wedlock
- \* the prevalence of non-legal childbearing family formation.

These features have been considered deviant because they do not conform to the Western European pattern of family organization, and the term 'matrifocal' has been used to describe the dominant Caribbean family pattern.

The characteristic features of Caribbean families have been variously explained by anthropologists. On the one hand, they are considered to be the result of the harsh and brutal conditions of slavery which prevented the formation of close family ties; and, on the other, they are seen as the retention of features of West African tradition and culture which have persisted despite the experience of slavery. The stability of these patterns, over time, suggests that the existing forms of family are functional responses to economic factors such as poverty, unemployment and other adverse



conditions. The matrifocal family not only provides a level of flexibility for women in residential, kinship and mating patterns, but also permits adaptability in the face of economic change. Very often, women prefer not to establish permanent or semi-permanent relationships with men. The reasons women give for this are:

- a. The presence of the man does not necessarily mean that the family will be better provided for financially. In many instances, he becomes another expense on the household;
- b. Such an extra expense can restrict the woman's options in terms of providing economic support for herself and her children;
- c. Legal ties may result in the woman's loss of complete custody and control of the children;
- d. The fear of domination and subordination by men;
- e. Informal relationships allow for the easier formation of, and access to, the extended family.

Single parent households also result from death or separation and, for married couples, divorce. In addition, increasing numbers of single professional women are adopting a child or are electing to have and rear a child without the physical or financial support of the father. Some single professional men are also adopting and raising children. These new family forms create very special challenges for the single parent but, because they are usually the result of choices made after careful consideration, the parent's commitment is often intense.

While women accept the absence of their male partners from the household, they build strong supportive networks with their close relatives, neighbours and friends. The household in which the family lives may be quite large and the kinship network very often extends beyond the household. It can extend beyond the community and even beyond the country, so that the family includes members who are widely separated but who share

emotional and psychological ties and who, according to need, can either seek or offer financial and other support in times of crisis. The kinship network, which provides emotional as well as financial support is very important for the woman who has a child but little or no support from the male partner. Such a woman faces what Olive Senior describes in *Working Miracles [1992]* as a 'manless, jobless and sometimes hopeless' predicament, which compels her to seek employment. In the absence of formal child-care facilities, she depends on a member of her network - her mother, aunt, grandmother, older sibling, friend, and neighbour - to carry out the caring/nurturing role while she assumes the role of provider. She may become a domestic helper, in which case she is often paid to perform the caring/ nurturing function for the children of the middle or upper-class family which employs her, while at the same time delegating the care of her own children to others. Many women have become involved in home-based income - generating activities, for example, craftwork, growing food for market, dressmaking, crochet, which allow them to combine their providing and nurturing roles.

The woman usually assumes primary responsibility for the home and for the care of the children. She is the authority figure who makes the decisions and determines the discipline. If a man is present, however, he is regarded as the undisputed head of the house. The attribution of headship to the male may well be symbolic, a conforming to religious and societal norms, since the actual household decision-making is carried out by women. Male authority is usually dependent on the man's economic contribution to the household and the extent to which the family depends on this contribution. The deference paid to men by women may well be a method of communicating the expectation that men will assume, and continue to assume, financial responsibility for the home. In an essay dating from 1986 on the family and women in the Caribbean, Christine Barrow reports considerable sexual antagonism in Caribbean families because of the perceptions men and women

have of each other. Women see men as authoritarian, dishonest, irresponsible and unreliable, while men consider women to be calculating, grasping, greedy and materialistic - the embodiment of Eve, Delilah and Jezebel - the Trinity of Treachery.

The father's presence in the home is, however, often transient, his financial and other support erratic. The children usually develop their sense of trust and security through interaction with the mother and depend on her, almost exclusively, to satisfy their needs.

Fernando Henriques commented on the psychological dependence of Jamaicans on their mothers, and attributed this to their complete reliance, as children, on the mother and the deprivation of a father's care. Although, in many instances, the father chooses to be absent, very often the mothers themselves exclude fathers from more intense involvement in the lives of their children, guarding jealously this area of responsibility which they view as uniquely theirs. Today, however, among younger family groups, fathers are increasingly observed taking their children to school, to the hospital, and participating in their care and nurture. This involvement may well be linked to the fact that their female partners, who have greater economic options and who are aware of the increasing educational and occupational opportunities open to them, have become more assertive in establishing a true partnership, in terms of child care and nurture, with their spouses.

### ***Jamaican Family Patterns, the Church and the Law***

Jamaicans are a deeply religious people. They freely admit to the centrality of religious beliefs in the governance of their personal and family lives. Most follow the Christian faith, although several other religious sects coexist with traditional denominations.

In the Christian church, marriage is one of the ceremonies, which signal significant events in the lives of believers. To the Roman Catholics, marriage is a sacrament, which mirrors the union of

Christ with His church and it is thus permanent and indissoluble. For Protestants, marriage is a religious rite. However, much controversy has centred, around existing family forms in Jamaica because of the prevalence of non-marital unions and the number of children born out of wedlock.

It is puzzling that Jamaicans, while admittedly very religious, persist in such unions, even though they are well aware that the church does not recognize common-law or visiting unions and also considers such relationships as living in sin. Perhaps the stability of these patterns over time means that they have the authority of the society behind them and so they continue to exist. It is estimated that seventy per cent of Jamaicans live in common-law or visiting unions. In light of this, it is reasonable to assume rejection of Christian marriage as part of their life style.

Many churches do not allow known partners in common-law unions to become church members and will withhold or withdraw membership from one who shares in such a relationship. The result is that, very often, the man and woman in a common-law union worship separately, keeping their relationship secret. The church has thus been charged with encouraging hypocrisy and deception. The Rev. Dr Vivian Panton presents the view of James Springer who considers Christian marriage to be:

*A value which has been passed on religiously and conscientiously for over 300 years by an institution that has had greater influence on our people than any other [and which] has simply not been accepted by them.  
[The Church and Common-law Union (1992) p. 31]*

Vivian Panton has recently challenged the non-acceptance of common-law unions by the church. He is of the view that the church is missing a golden opportunity to recognize a family pattern which is indigenous to the Jamaican people and which

should not be considered immoral or irresponsible. For him, this situation presents an opportunity to be seized in order to minister to and assist the men and women in these unions to participate eventually in a legal marriage contract.

Common-law unions have not been legally recognized in Jamaica although there is a precedent set in the Caribbean. The Barbados Family Law Act of 1981, Section 39, defines a union as:

*a relationship which has been established between a man and a woman who, not being married to each other, have co-habited for a period of five years or more.*

In Barbados, such a union is recognized in all areas of family law in relation to inheritance, maintenance and custody of children. One piece of Jamaican legislation which makes provision for a surviving partner in a common-law union is the Intestate Estates and Property Charges Act. This Act allows for the disposal of property where there is no will. It was amended in 1988 to allow the surviving partner in a common-law union to be one of the beneficiaries. This partner qualifies under the law as a spouse, provided that both persons were single and that they had lived together for at least five years prior to the passing of the deceased. In the event of the break-up of a common-law union, however, the absence of a marriage contract means that the 'wife' has no right to maintenance.

Until 1976, children of common-law unions were considered to be illegitimate. The Status of Children Act of that year removed all social and legal disadvantages from the children of visiting and common-law unions, and the term illegitimate, as it related to children, no longer applied. In the eyes of the law, therefore, all children are equal, yet many churches still discriminate against the offspring of non-marital unions. Such children are baptized

separately from children of married unions in a special ceremony in the church building, not in the sanctuary.

The long continuity and coexistence of the different family patterns in the Jamaican society have provided a variety of environments within which families develop and grow. The functioning of family groups within these environments also varies. Such a variety has implications for the attitudes, values, and behaviours of the individuals who emerge from these groups to function in the wider society.

## **The Socialization Process**

The marital patterns and family structures, which are generated within the Jamaican setting, are important in terms of the home environments they create for the upbringing of children. Family structure influences the opinions children form, the attitudes and values they develop, and the types of behaviour they display. Societal, sub-cultural, group and individual behaviours have been traced to the development of attitudes and values resulting from childhood experiences.

Children are born helpless yet biologically equipped with a central nervous system designed to enable the acquisition, manipulation and use of information from previous generations as well as from current events. The child's helplessness makes training and discipline possible during the nurturing process, which embraces physical care and love accompanied by the process of molding the child and his or her behaviours. Behaviour is shaped or modified, through interaction with others, to conform to the expectations of the family, the social class group, the sub-cultural group and the society. This shaping and modification constitute the socialization process, the major family function, through which the child attains a personal and a group identity together with a sense of social continuity.

As the first societal group to which a child belongs, the family provides the initial socialization into the accepted behaviours of the societal culture and therefore has a profound effect on an individual's behaviour. Adults who share the lives of children function as significant others in their personal, intellectual, emotional, psychological and moral development. The mother, who is the primary caregiver, the adult who normally spends most time with the children, exerts the maximum influence in this process.

Jamaican women assume motherhood readily since they gain status and identity within their communities on the basis of motherhood rather than of marriage. They often have their first child in their teen years, thus establishing their fertility and escaping the accusation of barrenness. Mothers also see children as both an investment and a resource. When they are young, financial support can be obtained from the father and, as they get older and become wage earners, they are able to make their mothers less dependent on men by providing some additional income. Many women are encouraged by their spouses to have several children, since the care of each new baby will ensure the mother's continued presence in the home and keep her dependent and submissive.

Mothers are held in high esteem, and this may well be linked to African revivalism in which respect for the matriarch is paramount and the sacredness of motherhood, pregnancy and the power of fertility are important features. Many men and women regard their mothers so highly that they admit to caring more for their mothers than for their mates or spouses.

A large proportion of households in Jamaica is poor and marginally able to provide basic needs. The Human Development Report, 1992, published for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), indicated that eighty per cent of Jamaica's rural population lives below the poverty line which is defined as:

*That income level below which a minimum nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are affordable.*

*[Pp. 208-209]*

The problems associated with this - lack of housing, inadequate nutrition, poor health care and a high disease rate, and a low quality of life - are all evident among poverty-stricken families.



Inevitably, such conditions have an adverse effect on the life, chances and life, experiences of the children of these families.

Visiting unions are the least stable of the three types of family pattern but they are the ones in which young mothers often find themselves. These unions do not always progress to a level of stability and, as a result, the young woman may go through a series of visiting relationships, resulting in a number of children. The informality of the conjugal structure discourages the use of contraceptives, and women have children for successive mates in an attempt to cement the relationship and secure financial support. This creates its own problems as many men are unwilling to accept responsibility for other men's children, and so they resist establishing a common-law or formal marital union.

The absent father, who may be either physically or psychologically absent, can be a feature of married, common-law or visiting unions. He provides for the children a role model of the father as an itinerant or detached male figure who provides erratic rather than consistent support of any sort to the family. Many of these fathers operate on the margins of the family, having limited involvement in child-rearing and family life. Boys in these families do not see the father in the role of spouse, supplying material, physical and emotional support. The girls do not have an opportunity to learn how to interact with men in healthy man-woman relationships. If, as many psychologists believe, parenthood is a learned process of experience, then both men and women from father-absent and father-distant homes will encounter difficulties in their own conjugal relationships as well as in parenting.

The absent father creates the absent mother who becomes the breadwinner, often resorting to low-paying jobs requiring her to work long, hard hours and forcing her to leave her children in vulnerable situations where they may be inadequately cared for.

The woman has to seek mental, emotional and physical support from sources other than the children's father - her support sources assist her to cope with childbearing, rearing and associated experiences. The importance of spouse support in areas other than financial is vital and is very often not sufficiently emphasized, but as Olive Senior observes:

*The paradigm of absent father, omniscient mother, is central to the ordering and psyche of the Caribbean family.*  
[Working Miracles p. 8]

Sometimes the mother is unable or unwilling to be the primary caregiver for the child, who may be abandoned or transferred from one home to another. Any one of a number of factors may result in child-shifting: the child may be sent to a relative, often a grandmother, in the country to be raised, thus freeing the mother in the urban setting to go to work; the mother may establish a new relationship and because the child is not wanted by the 'stepfather' he or she is sent to live with the natural father's relatives or some other relative; many childless women 'borrow' a child; several others, often with limited means, will assume responsibility for raising a young relative or a child from the community. The survey in the 1986 Women in the Caribbean Research Project revealed that fewer than fifty per cent of first born children grew up with their mothers.

Children who are frequently shifted develop no stable, continuous human relationships as they are reared in several 'homes' during infancy, childhood and adolescence. In many of the households and families there is no blood relationship and the children are not legally adopted. The experiences of children in these very unstable arrangements differ widely. Many are fully accepted and integrated into the household and are treated in the same way as are other family members. Others are constantly made aware of their marginal status. Such children spend most of their formative years

in a state of anxiety, lacking security, as they recognize that they are not part of a cohesive family unit and that, at any time, family ties can be interrupted or severed. Erna Brodber noted in *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica* [1974] the prevalence of child abandonment in Jamaica, and considers it to be an extreme form of the abandonment which many young girls practice when they give up their children to mother, aunt or other older female who then assumes the child-rearing responsibility. Although, in some cases, all their material needs are supplied and they are physically cared for, children in this situation are deprived of the interaction, love and attention of parents who, they feel, have abandoned them. Parents are also unaware of the dangers to which children might be exposed when they are left with parent-substitutes, who are ill equipped to provide for their needs.

Many parents, particularly when faced with economic pressures, do not establish any deep, psychological involvement with their babies, and have very little understanding of the responsibility associated with the upbringing of children. These children are cared for on a haphazard basis and are fortunate if there are other children or adults around who will play with and provide stimulation for them; if not, they are left alone most of the time. They quickly learn to be independent, however, and to do tasks to assist themselves and also look after their younger siblings when their mother goes to work. They often set their own routines for sleeping, eating, and play.

Maternal deprivation, particularly in early childhood, can result in retardation of social, physical and intellectual development. The absence of the mother from the home can, however, be compensated for by the extended family unit, which has, in the past, been a source of healthy, happy inter-relationships within the home. In addition, the diversity of these relationships makes the environment a stimulating one where the interactions with parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and non-kin adults

and children are warm and caring. The child can gain from this diversity and grow within a stable, secure environment. These relationships also benefit the elderly members of the family who are not isolated but continue to feel a sense of human involvement. Where, however, inter-relationships are unhappy and unhealthy then insecure, unsatisfactory environments are created and the effects on the child can be very damaging.

The quality of the interaction between adult family members and children may be such that the children are always receiving negative feedback. They are seldom given affection and love, so they feel rejected, they do not learn how to accept or give affection and have difficulty establishing emotional bonds as adults. Many children get little or no attention in the very important formative early years, and so enter school handicapped - socially, emotionally, as well as intellectually. The responses, which children receive determine whether the environment is perceived by them as friendly, indifferent or hostile; exciting, mundane or boring; whether the predominant view of their activities is constructive or destructive, whether their experiences lead to the development of a feeling of mastery or despair - 'I can' rather than 'I cannot'. Where children are too restricted in what they are permitted to do, when their efforts are met with rebuke or ridicule, they begin to doubt their abilities and the result is usually poor self-concept and low self-esteem.

Picture Keisha, whose conception is brought about in love, whose arrival is planned for and eagerly awaited, whose parents communicate with her in the language of love -touching, holding, crooning, talking, caring, encouraging and answering questions, reading stories; providing opportunities for exploration and experimentation with boxes, blocks and other play objects; guiding and encouraging the growth of independence, initiative and control; stimulating the development of all her senses and potential. Contrast this with Karlene, who is unwanted and was

resented from before birth, whose arrival into the world is treated as an intrusion, whose care is haphazard, with little love, a child who is left alone most of the time, who is spoken to rarely and then only in reprimand.

These are extremes, but both situations do exist. What views of self and what type of self-value are Karlene and Keisha likely to develop? What lessons have they learned even before they go to school? For Keisha, there will be the feeling of being someone precious, of great value, secure in the love and attention of caring parents. For Karlene, there will be mistrust, uncertainty about the world and of her place in it.

The family provides the child's first school and caregivers the first teachers. The learning process for children begins long before the acquisition of language. In the very early years, children build up, from experiences gained through interaction with people, objects, animals, places and events, basic concepts, which form the foundation for later learning. Play, for young children, is self-initiated learning, children's research activity, through which their muscles are developed by exercise and their minds, their imaginations, enriched by varying experiences. Children gradually learn to express themselves using language, copying the language of the parent or caregiver. That pattern thus becomes the basis of the child's expressive language.

There is a lack of verbal interaction in many family environments: adults do not talk to children; they exclude children from their talk; they complain that the children talk too much and ask too many questions; and they do not provide experiences for children about which they can talk. Many parents are unaware of the value of developing language to be used as an instrument of thought, description and analysis and unaware also of its importance in encouraging initiative and creativity. In many homes, language is used almost exclusively to express anger and disappointment and

to reprimand; children are 'shut up' because parents are tired or busy, and the silence and lack of communication among family members is masked by the noise of the television set or the radio.

The oral reprimand is often accompanied by corporal punishment in the large majority of households. D.R.B. Grant, noting the way in which children were harshly chastised, particularly in poor families, observed that, in these settings, there are:

*... Very few privileges to withhold, no time to reason with the child and no love to withhold from the child.*

*[Life Style Study: Children of the Lesser World. (1980) P.45]*

Maternal and paternal punishment were compared by Edith Clarke in *My Mother Who Fathered Me [1966]*. She commented that although the mother was strict in applying punishment, she usually alternated this with shows of love and indulgence so that the children were able to establish a bond of closeness with her. The father's punishment was usually harsh, administered only when the mother felt she could not handle the situation, and was hardly ever tempered by tenderness or reassurance of love. The type of father-child relationship resulting from this creates resentment on the part of children and fosters a negative attitude to authority. In some instances, also, the mother is such an authority figure and disciplinarian that she engenders anxiety and fear among her children and the mother-child relationship is distant and impersonal.

Although I have referred to poor families in describing the socialization process, development of strong emotional family bonds and secure, happy, well-adjusted children can be observed in the most poverty-stricken home as well as in the most luxurious mansion. Also, inadequacies in child-rearing and family stability are not limited to poor, lower class homes. Many children in the middle and upper classes suffer parental deprivation, and others are

over-protected to the point where initiative and independence are stifled, and overindulgence creates emotional insecurity and personality disorders.

The many factors, which influence the interaction and relationships among family members affect the process of socialization of Jamaican children and determine their social, emotional, and intellectual development as well as their ability to realize their potential in all spheres of life.

## **Threats to Family Continuity**

The continuity of family life is based upon the transmission of positive attitudes and values from one generation to the next. In Jamaica today, this process of socialization is affected by threats, which arise from various sources. These threats can result in change affecting not only the physical wellbeing of family members, but also the psychological climate of the home. This has implications for the quality of life enjoyed by the family members, the continuity and stability they are able to establish and maintain, and the progress of communities and the nation. Five of these threats will be examined here:

1. The shrinking economic resource base of the family.
2. Inefficiency of the educational system.
3. Adolescent parenting.
4. Family violence.
5. Inappropriate societal images/role models.

### ***The shrinking economic base of the family***

The economic state of the country and the high unemployment rates of both men and women have reduced the financial support available to families at a time when the cost of living is rising dramatically. External funding arrangements with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund under the Structural Adjustment Programme have resulted in a large national debt, and a substantial proportion of Jamaica's exports of goods and services is used to repay this debt. In 1989, this proportion was 26.4 % compared with 2.8% in 1970. The resulting cutbacks in public expenditure have adversely affected the availability of social services for the poor. Derrick Boyd reporting for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1988 indicated a reduction of 44% in real expenditure on education, health and social security



between 1981-82 and 1985-86. Other areas of cutback include transportation, communication, roads, agriculture and industrial services. Many government employees, most of them responsible for households, have been laid off their jobs. The inflation resulting from a series of currency devaluations over the past fifteen years has increased the cost of food, fuel, and public utilities as well as a host of other items. Food prices have also risen significantly as a result of the removal of subsidies.

The high rate of unemployment among men, particularly in urban areas, means that, even when willing, they are unable to provide financial support for their families. In 1990, the Family Court, which is composed of judicial and social sections providing family support services to the public, heard 2,690 cases where fathers were being sued for the maintenance of their children. The decline in male earning capacity makes it difficult for women to rely on men - whether their baby-fathers or new sexual partners - for financial support; they have had, therefore, to be more reliant on their own income and wages.

Jamaican women have a high labour force participation rate. Among them are many professional women for whom work involves using skills in which an educational investment has been made, and whose capabilities have been developed because of ability, interest, opportunity and commitment. The proportion of women in this category increased from 4% in 1943 to over 37% in 1984 [Gordon, 1989]. A large percentage are in the service professions - nursing and teaching - which are the lowest paid, but where the working hours allow a measure of flexibility and permit greater involvement in child rearing. Many professional women rely on domestic helpers to assume responsibility for day-to-day household chores, and child-care. These helpers come from the large majority of Jamaican working women who provide a source of cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labour and who work in areas which reflect the sexual division of labour - in handicraft, garment

making, domestic service, growing and trading in food. A number are employed in labour-intensive industries where they do monotonous, repetitive tasks for low wages, and where there is limited opportunity for skill training or promotion. Others have become risk takers and have established themselves as Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs), traders in consumer goods, who travel abroad and purchase goods for sale locally. Many also become street vendors.

The work done by women in maintaining the family unit is essential to the functioning of society and of the economy, yet has little recognized economic value, and no legal or social status. Hilary Phillips noted in 1987 that a Jamaican wife could make no claim to the division of matrimonial property if her contribution to the home was limited to cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. She can only substantiate a claim if her name is on the registered title, if she makes direct financial contribution to the purchase of the property or if she pays some of household expenses. Phillips pointed out that this situation differs from that in Barbados and Trinidad where the wife's non-financial contribution to the maintenance of the household is recognized and quantified in the division of matrimonial property.

It has been estimated that 42% of all households in Jamaica are headed by women, with the percentage in the Kingston Metropolitan Area rising to 45%. These women are often the only source of financial support for their families, but they earn lower wages than men, and are more likely to be unemployed. In 1990, the unemployment/job-seeking rate for men was 13.7% while that for women was 33.2%.

In July 1984, the Food Aid Programme was introduced, designed to cushion the effect of the removal of subsidies on basic food items to the most vulnerable in the society: school children, the

poor, the needy and the elderly. The objectives of the Programme are:

- To maintain existing nutritional levels of persons at risk of malnourishment because of changes in purchasing power.
- To provide minimal nutrition intake levels for persons with no or little visible income.
- To improve the nutritional levels of school children through the School Feeding Programme.

Reports suggest that this programme is inadequate in meeting the demand, which exists among the target groups. No significant difference has been found neither in participation in the Food Stamp and School Feeding Programmes, between female-headed households and male-headed households nor in indicators such as health, nutritional status, and learning progress in school. Louat, Grosh and van der Gaag [1992] advise targeting rural households for social programmes directed at alleviating conditions of the poor, as such programmes will reach 87% of the poor; targeting female-headed households will succeed in reaching only 50% of the poor.

Coping strategies adopted by poor families involve the one traditionally employed by women: use of the kinship network. Kinship links allow them to respond to hardship and crises in creative ways. Deere et al [1990] report household exchange networks which increase the flow of food, services and cash among relatives, friends and neighbours. One example given is that of the exchange of fresh vegetables from rural relatives for manufactured items such as flashlight batteries from urban network members. Other strategies include cooperative measures such as 'partner' savings, and increasing the size of the household by bringing in additional income earners and persons who can assist

with household chores and child care, while those who can obtain employment do so.

Housing is a major problem. In urban areas it is unavailable and unaffordable and this results in overcrowding in small, badly ventilated homes with poor sanitation which leads to unhealthy personal habits and creates an environment in which disease is readily spread. D.R.B. Grant [1980] reported that children of varying ages, and both sexes, often sleep together on the same bed because there is no space for them to have a bed each. There have also been reports of children sleeping in shifts.

The Survey of Living Conditions in Jamaica reports a growth in the number of households since 1985 of approximately 13,000 per annum. This creates a strong potential demand for new housing, particularly in urban areas. The effective demand is, however, low, for although the need is there, the price-to-income ratio is high and is expected to continue rising. The housing available is therefore out of reach for most persons in a wide range of income groups. As a result, many families are forced to live in conditions, which are inadequate and uncomfortable.

The overcrowding and resultant lack of privacy creates tired, frustrated, anxious adults and children, who also have to endure the indignities and discomfort of an inadequate transportation system. In a *Gleaner* article, Eleanor Wint condemns the conditions under which transportation is made available to the public, and the hazards, which attend its use, particularly for children. She notes:

*Many of us have witnessed small girls being handed through a bus window to unknown male arms inside a crowded bus where she is squeezed into any available space. Or where bus conductors curse children to get up and give their seat to an adult and go and be squeezed into some space with a bottom in their face.*

*['Urban Bus System Hazards'. Daily Gleaner 18.11.1992]*

Such everyday experiences adversely affect the social, emotional and psychological well being of individuals, and deny family members the feeling of security and refuge which are so necessary for healthy interaction and relationships. They also result in large tenement yards and squatter communities. In some situations, these function like an extended family but in others the conditions encourage truancy and delinquency among children and gradually lead to criminal activity.

Most families struggle to provide basic needs for their members but there are affluent homes where the family members enjoy luxurious life styles. Problems can arise there too when the children suffer from over-indulgence and over-gratification. Many feel that their parents' wealth will constantly be there to support them, and so they lack motivation and see no need to exert themselves unduly in school or to prepare themselves for the world of work. In several instances, the children are deprived of their parents' time, attention and interest, but have large sums of money to spend on clothing, shoes, restaurant meals and, unfortunately, also on drugs. Children in this situation spend a great deal of time sampling the entertainment provided by the satellite dish, or in shopping malls and cinemas. Many suffer from boredom - by the time they are sixteen or seventeen, they have seen and done it all! The old concept of parties as family gatherings where friends get together to share and enjoy each others company, where a modest meal is provided and where parents can meet their children's friends, has given way to 'pay parties' for thirteen, fourteen and fifteen-year-olds. They pay for food, drink, and disco music, and the adult supervision is not specified, as in many instances, the parties are organized by young people, who also make a financial profit from these ventures. One wonders at the values of the parents who tolerate pay parties in their homes.

Money assumes great importance in the lives of these young people. They assess other individuals' worth and status on the basis of their material possessions and the frequency with which they travel overseas for vacations and shopping expeditions. They often fail to develop an appreciation for, and do not demonstrate qualities of, kindness, sharing, courtesy and respect for others.

One of the survival strategies used over the years to supplement the economic base of the family is migration. This occurs locally and there is considerable movement of young people from rural areas to urban centres, generated by the need for employment. International migration, particularly of men, is considered to be one of the major factors contributing to the large number of female-headed households in the Caribbean. At the turn of the century, many men migrated to find work - in Panama to help build the Canal, and to Cuba to harvest sugar. In the 1950s, whole families migrated to Britain, and since 1962, there has been a steady stream of migrants to North America. Chaney observed in 1985 that the Caribbean region as a whole sends out a greater percentage of its population than does any other world region.

Since 1965, the nature of the migrants has changed. The United States Immigration Act favours the granting of residence to better-educated and more skilled persons, and preference is also given to the reunification of families. What this has meant is that Jamaica is losing its educated and skilled personnel, the individuals most likely to be able to establish and support stable family life. Anderson [1988] reports that between 1976 and 1985, professionals and managers have accounted for 9.7% of all Jamaican migrants to the USA and Canada; craft persons and operators account for an additional 12%. In the health sector, 78% of the doctors and 95% of the nurses trained during the 1975 to 1985 period have migrated. Those who migrate do so during their most productive working years - between twenty and forty - and they leave behind the very young and the very old, often in

extremely vulnerable situations. Reports of thirteen -year-old girls living on their own or with elderly relatives who have no real authority over their activities, and of the children of families left with the responsibility for their care and nurture in the hands of the eldest sibling who is between thirteen and sixteen years old, reveal the extent to which our youths are at risk. This neglect of children is one of the major contributors to illegal adolescent drug use; and to the increasing reported involvement of young women, and men, in prostitution and pornography.

Migrants do send substantial financial and other assistance to those family members who are left behind, and these remittances have become an important resource, enabling provision of shelter through rent and mortgage payments, and improving life style through expenditure on household items and consumer goods. The UNDP Human Development Report of 1992 records that workers' remittances from abroad accounted for 2.4% of Jamaica's Gross National Product in 1989.

Although remittances help to relieve the financial burden, the human cost of material goods such as designer clothes and shoes, is very often too high in terms of the social, emotional, psychological damage to those who wear them, but who receive very little care, protection, guidance and love.

### ***Inefficiency of the Educational System***

The home is the first learning environment, but the school, the church and the wider society provide formal and informal educational opportunities for the intellectual, physical, spiritual, social and emotional development of the young. Education is concerned with all these aspects of development, not merely the intellectual, although it is this area which determines the form of the curriculum, the teaching methods used and the methods of assessment employed.

The education individuals receive and their levels of attainment have far-reaching implications for their ability to make informed choices, decisions about themselves, their families, their occupational and social roles. The school serves as an extension of the home in terms of its socializing function - assisting children with the very difficult and complex tasks of academic competence, self-reliance in all areas of life, moral development, acquisition of social skills, motivation and personality formation. Article 29 of the United Nations Rights of the Child Convention - to which Jamaica is a signatory - addresses the aims and content of education and stresses the development of the child's potential to the fullest, the preparation of the child for active and responsible citizenship and the development of respect for cultural and national values.

Educational provisions for Jamaican children differ, and affect their life opportunities, their future occupational and societal roles. For the more advantaged, there are kindergarten and private preparatory schools, an academic secondary high school education in public or private schools and tertiary education at the University of the West Indies, the College of Arts, Science and Technology, or overseas. For the less advantaged, community basic schools are followed by public primary school, the possibility of a secondary high school, but the probability of a vocational/ technical secondary school, and the remote possibility of tertiary education. In Jamaica, education has been considered to be the means whereby disadvantaged children can break the cycle of ignorance and poverty, and most parents identify a good education as one of the goals they have for their children. Many struggle and sacrifice to send their children to school, providing uniform, books, lunch and transportation.

A number of children, however, because of their home conditions, arrive at school tired, hungry, and unable to participate fully in the



learning experience. Many are kept away from school to assist in income generation, or because there is no bus fare, or lunch money for that day. Ruth Morris [1992], writing on school absenteeism, reports that, on average, girls leaving primary school after six years enrolment have received four years and four months of schooling, while boys have received four years only. Small wonder then that in 1988; the Grade 6 Achievement Test of the National Assessment Programme assessed 31% of Grade 6 students as being illiterate. Performance in the terminal examinations of the secondary system - the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) - is also poor: in 1990, only 28.8% of the students sitting CXC General English Language gained grades I and 2, while the comparable figure for mathematics was 25.7%.

The data point to inefficiency in meeting the cognitive objectives of the educational process. The result is that large numbers of young people are unemployed and unemployable, without any preparation for self-employment. Few of them have acquired the qualities, which belong in the effective rather than the cognitive domain of educational objectives. Included among these are the ability to set and meet personal and performance goals; interact with and influence others positively; accept responsibility for work; demonstrate initiative, discipline and industriousness.

All these qualities are vital, not only for employment but also for personal and social maturity. Those who have not acquired them suffer from low self-esteem and poor ethical standards. They are easy prey for those who need unquestioning assistance in illegal and immoral activities.

The educational system has been hard hit by the Structural Adjustment Programme, and the quality of education offered to students has been seriously compromised. Errol Miller reported in 1992 a decline of 33.8% in real terms and constant dollars in recurrent expenditure on education between 1977 and 1987. The

physical conditions in schools are often deplorable. Classrooms are overcrowded, and school premises, often vandalized, lack proper maintenance and repair. Fewer persons are selecting teaching as a career, and it is becoming an option of last resort. Teachers are underpaid and under-valued, de-motivated and disgruntled. They are often unavailable to students for valuable character-building, leadership -development activities such as Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, and extra- curricular clubs and organizations because they are busy trying to juggle two jobs in order to make ends meet.

The curriculum of schools tends to be limited in terms of the vocational skills and life preparation courses offered to students. Although a Family Life Education programme has been developed by the Ministry of Education, it is not given sufficient emphasis, probably because it is not an 'examination subject'. Traditional subject courses may also perpetuate biases rather than enduring values. King and Morrissey in 1988 sampled history, geography and social studies texts used in CXC courses and evaluated their content. Among their findings were the following:

- \* Non-whites and their cultures are portrayed negatively;
- \* Survival of non-European cultural forms is denied;
- The dynamics whereby contemporary Caribbean culture has developed have been ignored;
- \* Racial myths and stereotypes are perpetuated
- \* Achievements of non-white peoples have been ignored;
- Europeans continue to be portrayed as the only, or the main, actors, their customs and institutions held as being superior:
- \* Male dominance is supported and fostered;
- \* Use of language excludes women;
- \* Women are portrayed in subordinate and menial roles;
- The contribution of women to Caribbean development is omitted.

The most serious instances of bias were found in books written by non-Caribbean authors, or Caribbean nationals who have lived abroad for many years and who have limited exposure to contemporary Caribbean society.

Discipline in the public primary schools is often harsh, and not destined to build or enhance the self-concept and self-esteem of children. It is not unusual to see a teacher walking around her class with a belt over her shoulder, which she uses to maintain order among the forty to fifty children who may be in her classroom. There are no explicit statements on the methods to be used in the administration of school discipline and corporal punishment is applied in several primary schools and a number of secondary schools. When children are admonished, the effect is often self-loathing rather than an appreciation of right and wrong.

In the past, parent and teacher often agreed about those behaviours which were acceptable and those, which were not. Recently, however, parents have challenged teachers for 'wrongfully' punishing their children. Such disputes reflect differences between home and school-values and have consequences for the child's socialization. Guidance counselors who can play a vital role in assisting students in all aspects of their development are not available in all secondary level schools, and are not assigned to primary schools at all.

Many young people view education as irrelevant in terms of their personal goals. The criterion by which success is increasingly being measured is money, and in the Jamaican society, wealth and education are not necessarily highly correlated. Students view their teachers, for example, as individuals without ambition or status.

The inefficiency of the educational system has serious implications for national productivity, for the ability of young people to control their lives and for the parenting of the next generation. Parents,

particularly mothers, who are better educated, are more likely to understand and appreciate the complex demands of parenthood, the importance of antenatal care and of sound nutritional practices. They tend to have children who are healthy, and stable, quick to learn and likely to remain in school longer. These children have a better opportunity to understand and care about the human condition and also to contribute to a world in which new information, and new technologies demand human resource capable of dealing with these innovations for the betterment of societies and nations.

### *Adolescent Parenting*

The satisfactory establishment of a stable home environment is highly dependent on the maturity and sense of responsibility of the parents who have the task of caring for and nurturing their children. In Jamaica, high fertility rates and early child-bearing put at risk the lives of children produced by teenagers who are little more than children themselves. The figures on adolescent fertility are startling and pose a serious threat to family formation and continuity. The 1987 Young Adult Reproductive Health Survey conducted by the National Family Planning Board revealed that in 1984 28% of all live births were to girls of sixteen years of age and younger. One quarter of these was having their second child and 5% their third. In 1991, between January and November, 25% of the over 11,000 babies delivered at the Victoria Jubilee Hospital were born to mothers in the 12-19 age range, and 103 babies were born to mothers who had not yet reached their thirteenth birthday. Verna Brooks-McKenzie [1992], who provided these data, also noted that many of these babies were abandoned at the hospital by their mothers.

Sexual activity is widespread among Jamaican youth. Hermione McKenzie [1992] reports a 1988 survey in which it was found that 50% of Jamaican males were sexually active by age fourteen; the

comparable percentage for girls was 15%. Of the boys, 14% had had a sexual encounter by age ten This survey also highlighted the limited use of contraceptives by men. In 1987, Joan Rawlins reported an increase in contraceptive use among young, mainly urban, women who want to control their bodies and their future, and who want to enjoy sexual freedom without the fear or responsibility of pregnancy.

In rural areas, however, she noted that there was still the feeling among young women that they must 'have out their lot'. They were responsive to the wishes of their male partners not to use contraceptives and expressed a fear of side effects associated with methods of birth control.

Irresponsible sexual behaviour among our youth, and the implications for their health, their work lives, their parenting and the socialization of the next generation, are of great concern. Much of this irresponsible behaviour is the result of ignorance - the lack of accurate, specific information on human sexuality and contraception at a time when it is of benefit to the individual. Their parents are often ignorant about such matters themselves, or they are too embarrassed to provide the necessary Information and instruction. McKenzie contends that late exposure to family life education is one of the major reasons for unplanned pregnancy in Jamaica. When pre-teens are involved in sexual behaviour, society does not meet the challenge when family life education, contraception and sex-education are not introduced into the curriculum until secondary school.

Serious consequences attend adolescent parenthood. The young mother is often forced to discontinue her education, thus making it impossible to develop fully the skills she will need in order to provide for herself and her child. She is faced with accepting a job, which offers a limited income or becoming one of the unemployed. Her financial burden and other problems may create a situation in

which she may enter into a relationship, which provides some short-term security but leads to a second or third pregnancy and so the cycle continues. In Barbados, where abortion has been made legal, there has been a dramatic drop in teenage childbearing but concern has been expressed at the irresponsibility of young people regarding contraception, and the casual use of abortion for birth control.

Early pregnancy also presents a major health hazard for the adolescent mother whose physical growth is not yet complete. The maternal mortality rate is 40% higher for mothers under fifteen and 13% higher for mothers between sixteen and nineteen than it is for mothers in their twenties [Brooks -McKenzie, 1992].

The child of adolescent parents is also at risk. The teenage mother's precarious economic situation means that she has to combine mothering with income-generation. She often has to be away from the baby for much of the day, if not for prolonged periods of a month or more at a time. The result is a lack of bonding between the mother and infant. The baby stops breast-feeding. It is now being thought that early termination of breast-feeding and substitution of inappropriate foods are important causes of poor health and malnutrition among children in Jamaica.

An intimate interrelationship exists between children's biology and the environment in determining their functional capabilities. When there is a small family income, where protein is the most expensive food, where pregnant and lactating mothers are inappropriately nourished, where there are poor dietary and health habits, where there are inadequate housing conditions, overcrowding together with reduced ability to pay for health and educational services, the child's growth and development are retarded. When a woman takes her sick child to a crowded health centre or hospital clinic and has to wait hours for attention, she loses a day's wage. A private doctor and medication costs her a week's wage. The result is that the

young child is vulnerable to illness and infection. Immunization is postponed, and symptoms such as fever, pain, and diarrhea proceed unchecked and unattended, with dire consequences.

In the home, these conditions create a psychological climate of anxiety, irritability, lack of patience and tolerance. Parents often feel a sense of futility and frustration, the result of their inability to meet urgent physical and material needs. They cannot spare a thought for the child's psychological needs.

Children who are poorly nourished or ill are unable to maximize their intellectual potential; they are distracted from learning by their hunger or pain, they demonstrate reduced responsiveness to the environment and so are deficient in their ability to maintain concentration in the learning situation. The child not only loses learning time, but learning itself is inhibited during certain critical periods of development; for example, children are best able to acquire language concepts at certain developmental stages. If the conditions, which facilitate this learning, are lacking at that particular stage, then such learning will be compromised. Interference with learning at these critical periods, therefore, results in deficits of crucial and long-term significance.

Children who suffer from learning deficits, who live in a tension-filled atmosphere, who have to observe arguments, and endure the anxiety of seeing their mothers or caregivers depressed, ill and exhausted, are also often victims of neglect and abuse. They develop poor self-concepts and low self-esteem. Eventually academic performance on complex learning tasks will be impaired. The result can be lowered motivation and the formation of a disturbed personality.

## *Family Violence*

Violence permeates gender relationships throughout Jamaican society. It is a feature of the lives of all social classes, all ages, racial and ethnic groups. The victims are usually women. The Criminal Investigation Branch of the Police reported 1091 cases of rape in 1991; 378 to girls 14 years old and under, 137 to 15-18 years old, 314 to the 19-25 years old and 262 to the 26 years and over age group. The Crisis Centre established by concerned women's organizations in Jamaica has been providing support for women who are victims of domestic violence. Figures from the Centre reveal an increase in reports of this violence. In 1987, thirty cases were reported; in 1988, this went to 83; in 1989, it was 138, in 1990 the figure was 135 and in 1991, it was 235.

Until recently, there has been very little reporting of, and almost no public outcry against, domestic violence, probably because there is a widespread view that the woman is the property of the man. The increased reporting may be due to the fact that there has been a marked increase in this activity, but also, many women have found the courage to speak out about such abuse. Violence is a way of asserting power and control in relationships and it is expressed in different ways. Many women live with psychological and emotional abuse, with constant criticism, which undermines their confidence and keeps them in a submissive, subservient role. This psychological control, which extends to the children, also reinforces the male's authority and dominance and is often accompanied by controlled verbal abuse, and minor physical abuse. Women who live with such situations enforce the abuser's belief that he has the right to behave in this way. The children learn these patterns of interaction and these methods of inflicting mental cruelty. Other women and children suffer from physical violence, beatings and rape - outside and within unions. Children are also sexually abused. Increasingly, instances of fathers involved in



incestuous relationships with their daughters, sons and stepchildren are being reported.

In 1986, Dr. Denise Eldemire documented thirty-three cases of sexual abuse, which had been reported to the Family Court or presented at the UWI's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine. The group consisted of 28 girls and 5 boys ranging in age from 2 to 16 years: in 10 cases, the abuser was the father, in one case, the stepfather, in another case, it was the grandfather and in 12 cases, it was other relatives. The newspapers increasingly report sordid, almost unbelievable accounts of the violent sexual attacks on children from members of the community, where, in many instances, the abuser is a close relative, a neighbour, someone known to the child. It is also likely that the majority of these attacks are never reported.

In many instances, the mother refuses to believe that these abuses occur when they are reported by children. She is often afraid to believe as it threatens the financial and emotional security of her life, and forces her into making a choice between her spouse and her children. If she acknowledges what is happening and objects, she may herself become the victim of physical abuse. Many women stay in violent relationships and expose their children to the physical and psychological danger inherent in such families because of love, fear, pride, loyalty, embarrassment, low self-esteem, and economic and social dependence on the man.

The use of corporal punishment to correct children's behaviour, at home and at school has also generated much concern among educational and other psychologists who are alarmed at the levels of aggressive behaviour evident within Jamaican society and the extreme violence of this hostility and aggression when it is associated with crimes. Research has shown that children, whose parents use physical punishment to curb aggressive behaviour, may demonstrate more aggressive behaviour outside the home than

children who are punished in some other way. The model of the aggressively punishing parent is imitated, as this behaviour is much more influential in shaping the children's behaviour than is negative reinforcement. When a school yard fight is punished with floggings, what confused messages are the fighting children receiving? Eleanor Wint and Janet Brown [1988] reporting on a research investigation they conducted in low-income, high-risk communities in the Kingston Metropolitan area, noted the strong parental concern to make children obey, and the use of corporal punishment to achieve this goal. The punishment was often used severely and inappropriately.

Sally McGregor [1992] commented on the aggressive child-rearing practices of parents and the aggression evident in very young children. In a survey, which she carried out in 1985 among 75 mothers of children two to four years old, 59 beat their children with a belt or other instrument. The responses of four-year-olds to questions designed to assess their knowledge of social roles also highlighted the extent to which violence was seen as part of their lives. When asked what father does, the response was 'beat we', what teacher does, the same response: 'beat we', while the response in the case of the police was 'shoot we'. The society needs to be deeply concerned at the negative effect of such perceptions on the social and emotional development of the children.

This concern is critical; so too is action to deal with the problem. A Situation Analysis of the Status of Women and Children in Jamaica, published by UNICEF and the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) in 1991, reveals that violence is the third leading cause for the admission of children under fifteen years of age to all public hospitals in Jamaica. The leading cause is accidents, with poisonings the second.

The law provides for the imprisonment of persons found guilty of assaulting or beating a woman, but the maximum sentence is only

two months. For aggravated assault, it is six months. In both instances, a fine may be imposed instead of a sentence. Men found guilty of carnal abuse of a girl younger than twelve years of age are liable to life imprisonment.

The constant violence to which children are exposed, in movies and television shows, the vivid portrayals of injury and death, all affect their perceptions, attitudes and regard for human life. When this violence is mirrored in family life, in school, and is part and parcel of the child's community, the emotional stability of the child is seriously threatened.

The psychological damage that living with violence on a day-to-day basis can create, and the emotional scarring which results, inhibits the ability of individuals to care for, respect and form attachments with others and it generates violent behaviour among the victims. It is well documented that abused children become abusive parents, and the cycle of violence continues and grows, reaching outside the family unit and into the wider society.

### ***Inappropriate Societal Images/Role Models***

The various threats to family stability reveal the extent to which the family unit is vulnerable to the demands and pressures of the society within which it has to survive. The most pervasive of these are the views and values expressed by the leaders and public figures who emerge in communities and the society, and who are often highlighted in the media. These individuals serve as role models for the youth, and when the message of these models runs counter to accepted societal values, then new expectations and new goals are created for our young people. When this 'counter-culture' is supported by films and television programmes which vividly portray the gun, violence, drugs, illicit - near pornographic -sex scenes which are often glamorized, the family has a much more

difficult task to maintain a value system of decency, honesty and respect for humanity among its members.

The media have a profound effect on the lives and behaviours of young people, and this effect begins in early childhood, and increases in adolescence. Children exposed to aggressive movies, for example, subsequently choose more aggressive play than those whose movie exposure had been to a non-aggressive theme. The warnings to children not to try the amazing feats which Superman and Batman are able to accomplish reveal recognition of the extent to which they identify with their cartoon and real-life heroes. During later childhood and adolescence, children identify with other role models in the media and this is often expressed in their choice of occupational roles - girls want to become models, be part of the glamour industry, while boys seek to become the macho men which is the male stereotype often portrayed. The media recognize the large audience they have among youth. Several radio and television programmes and announcers cater to this group. The potential for good which such programmes have is very often cancelled out by other media programmes which highlight behaviours which run counter to the values the society desires its young people to develop.

Clothing and shoe designers also act on young people's need to 'belong' to their youth sub-culture by developing special styles, which cater to their life-styles and tastes. Similarly, individuals who seek wealth and power through the sale of drugs and pornography use strategies designed to attract young people, and inveigle them into deviant behaviour, in the belief that such behaviour will help them to be accepted, to be popular, to be able to buy the clothes and the shoes they crave in order to 'belong'. Young people who have no central core of family values to help them resist these human predators often fall victim to such strategies and find their lives damaged or destroyed by drug

addiction and other abuses, AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases.

The imitation of a model and the way in which imitation and modeling work together to produce social behaviours are both influenced by several factors. Much depends on the rewards which, in the child's perception, the model receives for that behaviour. For example, children who saw an aggressive model being rewarded, were critical and disapproving of the aggressive behaviour but imitated that behaviour more readily than did children who saw the behaviour punished. In our subcultures, where our gun Dons, drug Dons and music Dons are involved in activities, which are criticized and disapproved of because they violate social norms but who are rewarded through media exposure, community respect, and by financial and material gains, it is not surprising that they are the role models for the youth in their subcultures. Many of the young people are also the recipients of the largesse of these Dons, and so they are rewarded for vicariously identifying with them.

Individuals are also more likely to imitate models if they see resemblances between the models and themselves, if they have low self-esteem and high dependency needs. Many youths who have dropped out of school, who are unemployed, who want to make a lot of money in a short space of time, see more resemblances between the music Don, drug Don or gun Don and themselves than between themselves and the teacher, the minister of religion, the business executive or other professional, so the Dons become their preferred role models and their reference group. The values and behaviours adopted as a result are contrary to those, which support socially accepted norms of behaviour. There are indications that young children have accepted certain deviant behaviours as normal. When a six-year-old in Kingston can state his career goal as 'gunman'; when another recounts how his grandmother gave him a gun to hide under the bed; and when a teacher reports her shock and distress over Grade 1 pupils who, when told to applaud the

performance of their classmates, raised their first and second fingers in the air and made 'pow pow' sounds to imitate the shooting of a gun, there is no doubt as to the attitudes and values these children are absorbing.

In the face of the current economic and political situation, however, these behaviours prepare young family members to function and survive within their communities, and so serve as coping mechanisms and survival strategies within their own subculture. At the same time, though, they interfere with and inhibit the young people's ability to operate in mainstream society. Those who straddle the mainstream and subculture are the music Dons whose reggae and dance hall music are considered to have an intrinsic value which is accepted and promoted within the mainstream culture, even though most of the lyrical content reflects sub-cultural values. The penetration of these values into mainstream culture because of the popularity of the music - particularly among the youth - is a major anxiety, as it poses the threat of further erosion of decency, respect and high standards of behaviour.

The threats identified are experienced by almost all families in Jamaica and they create frustration, dissatisfaction, resentment and a sense of futility. The stresses are expressed in different ways - internalized in constant anxiety and worry, which can cause illness, or expressed in hostility, increased aggression or strong motivational levels. All of this has a critical impact on the very elements of family life it is important to maintain a sense of security and support, communication and sharing, together with respect and caring among family members.

## **Outlook for the Future**

The threats to family continuity discussed here all stem from changes in the society. The changes create situations, which demand urgent and immediate response from families, communities and the nation. All these institutions are at risk from the social disorganization, deviant behaviour and continuing intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual damage being experienced by the upcoming adult generation which will have to live and work in the twenty-first century.

What Jamaica is witnessing now is a crisis in human relationships clearly seen in children's lack of respect for adults; aggressive behaviour on the roads; abandoning of children to the streets; increasing drug use; the targeting of the most helpless in society for sexual abuse and violence; the viciousness of crimes; the formation of gangs which terrorize communities. All are related to changing values and new priorities. The family is no longer the place where a sense of belonging, a sense of tradition, love, communication and good human relationships flourish. The absence of this anchor for individuals leaves them drifting aimlessly in a hostile society.

The problem has many facets. Individuals become parents carelessly, without recognizing the extent of the responsibility involved. They quickly become disillusioned when the day-to-day realities of what is a lifetime commitment become evident. The opportunity to establish and build a family is not regarded as such and planned for, and the commitment required in terms of time, physical, emotional and psychological involvement, is not made. The abdication of responsibility by parents, and resultant abandonment of their children, whether physically or psychologically, is at the root of the problem. Problem children are not born; they are made by problem parents.

Problem parents provide a home environment which is hostile and marred by impatience and intolerance, empty of love and caring: where there are quarrels and fights, rather than discussions and communication; where punishment is inconsistently and harshly administered; where insecurity, mistrust and despair are the predominant feelings generated among family members. Problem parents preside over broken homes: not necessarily homes broken by the separation of parents, the break-up of a marriage or an absent parent, but homes in which, for whatever reasons, the functions of the family no longer operate, and the caring, sharing and support expected are absent.

Problem parents do not fully understand the demands which parenting will make on them and are ready and willing to give up the care and nurturing of their children to someone else. They do not recognize that although they will need, and obtain help from various sources in this task, the ultimate responsibility is theirs. They take for granted, for example, the assumption of childcare and rearing by one or other grandmother. Grandmothers are not, however, as willing or as able to become substitute parents as they were in the past. Many, particularly in the urban areas, are employed or running a small business and so have their own work lives in addition to their personal lives. Although they may assist in providing economic, and occasional or even regular child care support; they cannot assume full responsibility for child rearing. There are many grandmothers who consider it a duty to assume some responsibility for their grandchildren's upbringing, yet often resent the restrictions this places on their own activities, as well as the fact that this involvement is expected, and taken for granted by the children's parents.

Problem parents do not recognize and accept their changed status when they become parents. They do not seek to set an example for their children or to build a climate, which will generate respect for the adult by the child. Instead, differences between the generations



are minimized; parents dress and act like teens, however inappropriate this may be; insolence and defiance go uncorrected; use of indecent language is not only condoned but also engaged in by parents when speaking to children; there is no behavioural example set, no dignity preserved, no restraint exercised, no maturity displayed. Although intergenerational communication is to be encouraged, mutual respect must be integral to this communication.

Problem parents create a false foundation for their children. Parents who have struggled from poverty and have acquired the material trappings of middle and upper class life are frequently unwilling or embarrassed to reveal to children the nature of that struggle and are ashamed of their humble origins. Their children do not meet their 'country' cousins, aunts, or uncles, nor visit the village or town where their parents were born. Instead, they spend holidays in hotels or cottages on the North Coast. This abandoning of their roots by parents creates a void in the children's lives, and they grow up in a false world detached from their Jamaican heritage. Although, in some cases, there is no family home to visit in the country, family expeditions do not allow time for children to explore the by-ways, observe, communicate and identify with Jamaican people in country towns and villages, with the result that there are many Jamaican children who are more familiar with Florida, New York, or Ontario than they are with their own country and their own people.

Problem parents provide or seek to provide immediate gratification for their children's wants as opposed to their needs. They do not allow children to experience the satisfaction of owning something, towards which they have planned, worked and saved; they feel guilty if they deny their children anything they want. Thus they create the impatient generation, which must gratify its needs immediately; people, who must have, must do, at any cost. They become inconsiderate, demanding adults, who have great difficulty

adjusting to a life in which they have to rely on their own resources and become independent. They remain dependent on their parents well into adult life, or they find devious ways of maintaining the life style to which they have become accustomed.

Problem parents breed attitudes of prejudice and intolerance among children based on factors such as social class, age, status and material possessions. Such parents instruct their children about other children who are considered to be 'unsuitable' visitors to the home, unacceptable' friends, not because of their behaviour, but because of factors such as their home address or racial origin. Grandparents and older relatives are considered to be the 'disposable generation', and are rarely visited or included in family activities, so the wisdom of the old, their valuable perspectives and experiences, their provision of continuity through sharing of 'old-time' stories, are lost to the young. Within the homes of such parents, there is often exploitation of domestic helpers, a lack of recognition that they too have families and feelings. They are forced into working hours and conditions which make them absent parents, and prevent them from spending quality time with their own children.

Problem parents neglect and abuse their children, often with serious consequences. Many parents do not know where to find their teenage children at night, have no curfews, or have one, which is not enforced and so is not obeyed. Increasingly, we read of accidental poisoning in the home and of young children dying in fires when left alone with a lamp burning at night. There are also reports of parents sending their daughters to work in night clubs as scantily dressed dancers in order to earn money for their families, their sons to 'hustle' in the streets, and of fathers who feel that it is their 'right' to demand sexual intercourse from their daughters because they had undertaken the responsibility of their upbringing. Many children, mainly boys, have no home apart from the streets; they have been completely abandoned by their parents.

They do not go to school and, in order to eke out a living, they become involved in dangerous activities such as drug peddling, prostitution, and criminal activity.

If the family is not rescued, and rebuilt within our communities and our nation, we run the risk of seeing our Jamaican youth deteriorate and become alienated to the point where they are like the street children observed and vividly described thus by Father Richard Holung in 1989:

*Food and shelter for the body, ganja for the brain: these are the only goals of our children of the street. Survival being the only wisdom means they steal, grab, and fight for what they want. There is no inner desire for nobility, no search for spiritual qualities. Just physical existence and physical pleasure and the response to the variety of goods that don't last. For this, the children of the streets will kill.*  
[Daily Gleaner, 30.3.1989.]

This crisis must be averted. The national mobilization observed in the wake of physical crises such as a hurricane must also be brought to bear on this crisis which we admit exists, which may not have the immediate visible impact of a hurricane on the physical environment, but which has, and will have, even more damaging consequences on the lives of our people now, and for generations to come.

There are many families in Jamaica who are committed to doing the best they can in the task of family building, who are struggling to create family environments which are supportive of positive growth and the development of all members. Even as they cope with the internal family pressures which this process involves, however, they find that they are fighting increasingly to withstand the threats created by the wider society and problem parents who are producing a parallel family culture which is alien to that which

these praiseworthy parents want for themselves and their children. The task of preparing their children and adolescents to reject, and deal with this alien parallel culture becomes more and more difficult as many of its elements appeal to the young; having, going to, doing things that may be pleasurable, but which do not feature in the life styles of praiseworthy parents and their families.

The changes that are desired and the strategies, which need to be developed for dealing with this crisis, must address both the public and private spheres of life. These strategies must be based on fundamental, time-honoured values, which have been identified and agreed upon - certain crucial values, such as respect for self and others, which constitute the framework for human relationships. There must be consistency in terms of working to achieve these and there must be the motivation of parents, teachers, the young who are most at risk and, indeed, the entire society, to ensure that these values are understood and embraced by all.

In the public sphere, a massive campaign focused on the strengthening and rebuilding of families should be mounted. Such a campaign would underscore Jamaica's recognition of 1994 as the United Nations' Year of the Family. It would also provide opportunities for the education of people island-wide on the importance of healthy family life for the nation's future. Churches, schools, service clubs and other nation-wide organizations could work with the Ministry of Education, the Social Development Commission, parent-teacher associations and non-governmental organizations to stage public education seminars on parenting throughout the island. Together they could update and make more relevant the Family Life Education curriculum for use in all primary and secondary schools; produce and distribute video tapes which will dramatically communicate the messages which are important; and use popular television and radio programmes to highlight the importance of building healthy family relationships. Stories, plays, poetry and songs written by children and children's

authors, all of which are value-laden, should be used to help to transmit the critical messages as should dramatic presentations and posters by children.

Teacher education programmes to support this initiative will have to be planned and implemented. Teachers have a most important role to play in this campaign. Changes in educational objectives since the mid-twentieth century have reduced the emphasis on the teacher's role in character-building, attitude and value formation. The Teaching of Morals was a requirement in the Jamaica Department of Education Code of Regulations in 1895. Trevor Turner reports that the curriculum was based on Christian ethics and used stories, proverbs, biographies and Biblical verses in developing:

*reverence to God, truthfulness, honesty, purity, obedience to parents, to teachers and to those in authority, love of country, industry, temperance, self-respect, good citizenship, fidelity to official trust.*

*[1987. 'The Socialization Intent in Colonial Jamaican Education, 1867-19 11'. p. 67]*

Similar objectives ought to be seriously considered for reintroduction into the school curriculum. In addition, projects such as the Change From Within Project being conducted in two schools and which looks at new approaches to bringing about changes in hostile and negative relationships among children, parents and teachers, can provide models in value clarification and development which can be used more widely. The value transmission, which occurs, directly or indirectly, in classrooms, on the school grounds and through observation of the way the teachers behave, is a potent force in developing the attitudes of young people. In a tribute to one of her teachers, Yvonne Grinam wrote:

*But you were more than a teacher of English. You taught us to understand life and to embrace it with all the enthusiasm and joy that it held. Through the characters in the English Literature that we studied you taught us what some of our parents never did teach us. Unswerving faith, trust, love, virtue - good Christian principles. You also taught us that hypocrisy was wrong and that we should always be truthful no matter what the cost.*

*['Letter to a Teacher', Flair Magazine, 18.1.1993]*

The compensatory role which teachers can play when parents fall short is clearly identified here as a quality which impressed this student, and it is one that teachers should be prepared to assume whenever the need is indicated.

Service clubs and past students' associations can also assist in this regard by implementing mentoring programmes. In such a programme, an adult develops a helping, advising relationship with an adolescent whose family may not have the resources to bring about change internally.

Some people and organizations have already become involved, albeit on a small scale. The YWCA has been working in Trench Town and they are incorporating a family life education component into their skills training programme for self-employment. Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) offers mentoring to young people. A young doctor and his wife are working with young people in their community to demonstrate the enjoyment available through alternative entertainment. They get together for games, discussions, debates and competitions. Each person brings a food item and they share what is provided. The numbers increase each month. One service club is printing and distributing memory gems for display and discussion in schools. One mother refuses to be intimidated by what she calls the culture of fear, which has developed because of societal behaviour, which

has paralysed and trapped us. She points out, objects to and corrects inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour of children and young people who may or may not be strangers to her but who display such behaviour in her presence. More of this is needed. Each individual has to try to do what he or she can to make a difference, to counter the problems the society faces. Everyone must take time to care.

Young people need to develop a philosophy of life - to have a moral, ethical framework on which to build their lives. It is this framework which provides a basis for decision-making, enabling them to make choices which are morally responsible and based on accurate information. Churches have a responsibility to educate young people regarding the resources of the religious tradition in meeting this need. Active, vibrant young people's groups need to be sponsored, through the church and other concerned organizations, to attract youth and involve them in wholesome, character-building activities and provide moral and spiritual guidance which will encourage them to consider the values identified as important in the creation of a changed society. Ministers of religion should prepare their entire services, and particularly their sermons, to appeal to young people as well as to adults, carefully instructing their congregations in ways which can help them clarify their values; public pronouncements by national leaders should focus on cherishing, nurturing and investing in the young lives of the nation. 'Make it Jamaica' days can encourage Jamaicans to visit the countryside, see and appreciate the beauty of Jamaica's interior, regain confidence in the friendliness of the people, and stimulate family interaction, caring and sharing. Those values, which we identify as crucial, must be communicated in as many ways as possible, and presented with such impact, consistency and thoroughness that they permeate society, and can compete with the strong negative ones already operating.

The challenge is daunting and the magnitude of the task cannot be overstated. There are no immediate financial or material rewards for embracing these values. With employment among youth in Kingston reported by Professor Carl Stone [1993] to be in the region of 50 - 60%, rising to 70 - 80% in inner city areas, the success of the campaign may well be partially, if not wholly, dependent on the availability of employment opportunities, skills training and financial assistance in establishing small, self-owned businesses, so that the economic base of the family may be improved. An increase in the social services provided by the government would also help to alleviate the problems.

Changes in the public sphere can, in some instances, be legislated, in others managed and organized; they create awareness, an understanding of the standards and expectations of society and, because of the expected outcomes, and progress can be monitored to a certain extent. Changes in the private sphere can be advised but not enforced, and even if the advice is taken, the change in attitude and the resulting outcomes may not be immediately visible but may take a generation to be evident.

Education is central to bringing about attitudinal and behavioural change in any sphere and must, therefore, be a major element in the campaign. The education needed will be both formal and informal. The task will be to prepare children and young people to take control of their lives, to become responsible citizens, caring spouses and praiseworthy parents, establishing homes in which the interaction, the communication and the values developed are those which are crucial for the nation's progress.

In these homes, the vital importance of communication among family members must be understood and appreciated. Parents and children must have opportunities to express and discuss feelings; ideas, opinions and reactions, to share dialogue freely, to seek rational solutions to everyday family problems and conflicts. These



opportunities can be created in the poorest, as well as in the wealthiest and the busiest home, once parents are committed to quality time with their children. It may be around a table at a meal which the entire family shares; it may be a radio or television programme to which the family listens, or views, and discusses; it may be a walk to or from school, church, or the shop, where everyday happenings present a basis for useful critical commentary; it may be the half-hour before the children go to sleep when the day's events are recounted, laughed over or seriously considered. This time involves all family members in listening, talking, understanding and sharing. It deepens and strengthens the family ties.

Within the family, each member needs to be taught to make a contribution to the work of maintaining the family unit, and not be only a recipient of family benefits. Although in some homes, children do no chores at all, in others they have such heavy and demanding chores that they are physically exhausted and psychologically drained. Children should be given reasonable chores, and these should be obligations, which must be fulfilled. Boys and girls should share in these households' chores equally, without any designation of some tasks as girls' tasks and others as boys' chores.

The communication among family members must include standards for behaviour which are consistently applied, and which demand obedience - not through harsh, authoritarian discipline, but through careful understanding of the difference between right and wrong, acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour. These expectations are communicated much more forcibly through the example set by parents than through preaching. A delinquent boy once told me that his behaviour stemmed from the hypocrisy and double standards of his parents, the inconsistencies between the values they defended and upheld in public, and the lives they lived in private. He declared that his parents' lives were a sham, and he

did not want to be anything like them. The tasks of character building, developing self-confidence, self-discipline and respect for authority are vital, and it is through a knowledge and understanding of the rules, and the observation of these rules being obeyed, that youth accept the standards which permit assessment and evaluation of their own behaviour as well as that of others - their parents included. Associated with this is the encouragement of self-expression among young people, so that their feelings and opinions can be clearly voiced and understood, and they can be helped to stand firm against group and peer pressure. A careful balance must be established between control by parents and the essential push towards independence and autonomy.

This independence and autonomy must have an ethical and moral underpinning. The spiritual needs of the family are just as important as its physical and psychological needs. There must be a central unifying force, a source from which the family unit obtains its spiritual strength, and which provides a basis and support for the values upheld and the standards set in the home. The principles of the Christian religion transcend all denominational lines and provide a strong foundation on which family lives can be built. The love and relationships, which exist between parents and children, can well be patterned after Christ's love for all mankind - unconditional, unselfish and giving. Sensitivity to the spiritual needs of family members allows for the identification of the many opportunities each day to link the principles of honesty, justice, industry and service to their lives and experiences, and so spiritual guidance is interwoven with family life and the Christian life is not a theoretical concept, but a lived reality.

The strength of the family is dependent upon the involvement and commitment of the entire society, all social groups, and all resources - human and otherwise - to building and supporting family life. The family must have adults who share a covenant of love and a commitment to each other, who assume parenthood

responsibly, understanding the demands it will make on them, the lifetime commitment it requires to meet the physical, psychological and spiritual needs of all family members. The retention of those basic values, which are important in maintaining human respect and dignity, must be an integral part of the home and family. Ensuring this continuity assumes even greater importance when there is the need to recognize and cope with the value conflicts, the alternate life styles, the many pressures from sources in the public and private spheres, which threaten family, community and national life.

The restoration and renewal of the family in Jamaican life is a responsibility we all must assume - ensuring continuity in the face of change is the task of all the nation's citizens.

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