

# CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM

by **Janet Jagan**

Caricom countries frequently have similar problems and columnist Rickey Singh in a commentary in the Barbados "Nation" pointed to the crisis and challenges in our school system. He focused on the growing indiscipline, violence and immoral conduct in the schools of the Caribbean community. He noted that these problems extend from rude and delinquent behaviour to sexual improprieties, crimes of violence and peddling and consumption of illicit drugs.

Here in Guyana, we are experiencing some of these same problems, which seem to be even more prevalent in countries like Jamaica, although I suspect some of his references were to Barbados where he has been living for many years.

In Guyana, there has been an explosion of views on the use of corporal punishment in schools, which some believe is the answer to the growing problems in

schools, some leading to extreme violence and injuries or even death. My own view is that corporal punishment is just a carry-over of very

in the school room is not dependant on hitting the child for misbehaviour, but using other methods, more suited to the age in which we

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old and stagnant thought on how to deal with difficult students. Violence against children is surely not the way to contain this new development of violence, indiscipline and immoral conduct of the nation's children. Maintaining discipline

live. We have to understand what is happening in our schools, not only in the Caribbean, but all over the world. It has to do with the phenomenal changes that have and are taking place everywhere,

but primarily due to the sudden advances in science and technology, the changes in the family system, the widespread migration from country to country and the unexpected changes in communication that could never have been anticipated, mostly since the end of World War II.

The old, reliable family system that existed from earliest times, is no longer what it used to be – a tight system that guided, protected and, one might say, controlled the lives of most of the world's peoples. Now divorce rates have climbed to unbelievable rates, one parent households are probably greater than 2-parent households, family elders who once gave stability and guidance to younger family members, those of school-going age, are shunted out of the family structure and children lack the family discipline and control that once kept many of the ills now facing the younger generation under control.

Television, so perva-



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sive now, has great influence over most of the global population and the lack of control of this media permits young people to view violence, drug and alcohol usage, promiscuity, etc. as a normal part of life and thus open to general "usage". The cell phone used by many school children right in the schoolroom, so much a part of life now almost everywhere, makes it much easier for school children to arrange meetings that become part of their sexual or drug involvements.

That is why in Rickey Singh's article, he is strongly recommending that they be banned from the classroom. Also, there is so much evi-

dence available of children becoming involved in internet violations of decency, like child pornography and meeting arrangements that have led to so many defilements of young people. These horrors often occur because of the weakened family system, the lack of attention being paid by adults to their childrens' usage of modern technology for wrong purposes and also the lack of genuine teacher control of what is going on in their classrooms.

When we look back a few decades, we can almost trace the growth of new technology, the breakdown of family life and the lowering of standards in the teaching profession with some of the sad developments taking place. And the question of corporal punishment really doesn't enter the equation. We have to carry out in-depth studies to determine the 'why' of the decline in our schools and find ways and means of stemming the tide that is pushing the world's school children in the wrong direction.