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**Summary of Proceedings  
Public Hearing**

**Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration**

Held on Wednesday February 15, 2017

[11:00 a.m. to 1:05 p.m.]

**Inquiry:** An inquiry into the prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) amongst school students and into the general services administered to treat STDs in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Objectives of the inquiry**

The objectives of the inquiry are:

- 1. To determine the prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) (including HIV/AIDS) amongst secondary school students;**
- 2. To assess strategies the line Ministry is implementing to reduce the rate of infection amongst this cohort; and**
- 3. To evaluate the quality/standard of health care services and facilities provided/available to treat STDs and the associated costs.**

**Venue:** The J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

**Committee members**

The following committee members were present:

1. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP – Vice-Chairman

3. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP

**Witnesses who appeared**

The following officials of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education appeared before the Committee:

**Ministry of Education**

- i. Mrs. Angela Sinaswee-Gervais – Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- ii. Mr. Harrilal Secharan – Chief Education Officer
- iii. Ms. Darlene Smith – Guidance Officer II
- iv. Ms. Amanda Pedro – Guidance Officer II
- v. Mrs. Beryl Riley – Guidance Officer II

**Ministry of Health**

- i. Mr. Richard Madray – Permanent Secretary
- ii. Dr. Roshan Parasram – Chief Medical Officer
- iii. Dr. Aruna Divakaruni – Specialist Medical Officer, QPCC
- iv. Dr. Ayanna Sebros – Deputy Director HIV/AIDS Unit
- v. Dr. Jerry Edwards – Director, Medical Research Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago

**Key Issues Discussed**

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

**Issues discussed with the Ministry of Education**

- i. Whether the Ministry of Education's Health and Family Life curriculum has equipped students to effectively deal with matters concerning STDs;

- ii. The lack of training programmes to better equip teachers to deal with inappropriate sexual behaviour among the student population and the existence of students infected with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs);
- iii. There is a need for additional educators who specialize in Health and Family Life Education (HFLE);
- iv. Challenges are encountered by the Ministry in delivering the sex education syllabus in denominational schools;
- v. There is resistance from parents as it concerns the participation of students in the Health and Family Life Education Programme (HFLE),
- vi. The distribution of condoms to school students has also been met with resistance;
- vii. The lack of support and resources afforded to Principals tasked with the responsibility of *loco parentis* in instances where students are in need of urgent medical treatment;
- viii. The need for collaboration between the Ministry of Education's School Support System and the MoH with reference to the provision of support services to schools and teachers in dealing with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs);
- ix. The need for greater collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in strengthening the current Health and Family Life Education Programme (HFLE) and other programmes/initiatives targeted to curb inappropriate sexual behaviour, and by extension, the spread of STDs amongst school students;
- x. The current ratio of Guidance Officers to students at the Secondary School Level;
- xi. Social media is used as a platform by school students to display inappropriate sexual behaviour;
- xii. The efforts of the Ministry of Education to promote abstinence among the student population at both the primary and secondary school levels; and
- xiii. The support services provided to teenage girls who become pregnant and those who are teenage mothers.

**Issues discussed with the Ministry of Health**

- i. Due to the issue of confidentiality, it is difficult to ascertain whether persons visiting testing centres/health institutions are school children;
- ii. The reason for the delay in the completion of the 2016 Global School-Based Student Health Survey Report;
- iii. Reports of students engaging in sexual activities with adults;
- iv. There are students at the primary school level who are HIV positive;
- v. The need for a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) machine in treatment facilities. This machine is required to diagnose Chlamydia trachomatis infections. It can also be employed to diagnose conditions such as HPV and Gonorrhoea with more accuracy;
- vi. The practice of illegal abortions among the school population; and
- vii. The current rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

**Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing**

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. That the number of Guidance Councillors assigned to schools be increased;
- ii. That Sex Education Tutors be assigned to all secondary schools;
- iii. That there be greater collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in strengthening the current Health and Family Life Education Programme (HFLE) and other programmes/ initiatives targeted to curb inappropriate sexual behaviour and STD infections amongst school students; and
- iv. That social media be utilised as a communication platform to promotion abstinence and boost awareness of the various risks associated with unprotected sex and their health effects.

*Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration  
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,  
Community Development and other Social Services)*

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**View the Hearing**

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://youtu.be/-imoSHVBCVY>

**Contact the Committee's Secretary**

jsscspa@tpparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2283

*Committees Unit*

*February 20th, 2017*