



Regional assessment with adolescent networks and regional partners in the Caribbean to determine the components of girls' empowerment

December 2023





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We don't have the encouragement [at] home...and some parents are very strict. You have peer pressure coming on from school, from your friends. You don't want to do it. You look for support outside. And by looking for the support outside, sometimes problems come about because they come from a different background. So we have to find that support that we need, I think, got to build our confidence within. You start with that, and then you, within yourself, have to look for someone that sometimes is not within your home; you have teachers, guidance counsellors, pastors within your own church...somebody that you turn to for that support, and you [are] positively sure they are giving you correct guidance.

Participant perspective

SNAPSHOT

116

Focus group
participants

10

Organisations

12-23+

Age range

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Key terms

Agency

The personal capability to act and make free and informed choices to pursue a specific goal. It is seen as an asset which can be used to determine what an individual can do or use to reduce vulnerabilities and expand opportunities.

Empowerment

The ability to make choices and having resources available to make these choices. It requires that people must reach the place where they can be self-governing and act on their own reasoning, beliefs and values.

Gender Norms

Accepted attributes and characteristics of male and female gendered identity at a particular point in time for a specific society or community. They are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community.

Resilience

The ability of the girls to use their innate sense of knowing to thrive and adapt to their taxing and demanding life experiences, and survive their situations and personal challenges.

Transgenerational Gender Norms

The standards and expectations which are transmitted through different generations to create concepts of how males and females should be. The social and family learnings of sex and gender related patterns usually occur from early childhood as an embodied, automatic and somewhat unconscious process.



Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
FV	Family Violence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
SI	Spotlight Initiative
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
TA	Thematic Analysis
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VAG	Violence Against Girls
VAW	Violence against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls



1. Executive Summary

In the work around domestic and family violence, different approaches by governments and civil society have been embraced. Focus has been on implementing laws and policies designed to increase among other things, girls' access to education and the increased participation of women in public fora. It is recognised that there is need to identify and advance other initiatives to counter the unequal power relations which exist between women, men, girls, and boys, and which is evidenced through ongoing violence. In this regard, systematic and evidence-based programs are critical in providing space for the questioning of gender stereotypes and changing the social norms which negatively impact the lives of girls and women. Girls' empowerment is seen as a fundamental layer in creating much needed change and refining narratives.

This research from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Nina Young Women's Leadership Programme, with the support from the Spotlight Initiative (SI) Caribbean Regional Programme, seeks to identify and review empowerment strategies for girls as a prevention strategy in the eradication of Gender Based Violence (GBV). Focus groups were conducted with more than 100 young women from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Sint Maarten, and St. Kitts and Nevis who were members of established community groups. These sessions provided a platform for young women to openly share and discuss their experiences and define for themselves their ideas of empowerment and what would be required for effective and life changing support.

The resilience of the young women was evident throughout all of the focus groups. Despite their circumstances and perceived realities, they continued to see themselves and to use language that was self-motivating and self-empowering. Their expressions of their experiences show how transgenerational gender norms was a fixed facet of their lives, evident in the findings in the areas of Abuse, Sexuality, and Shame and Judgement.

This study has generated concerns about the extent to which transgenerational norms influence, both positively and negatively, the opportunities and choices that are available for young women in the Caribbean.

Overall, this assessment demonstrates the need for intensive and focused programming and strategies around GBV that are not only targeted to this young population, but also to the different generations of men and women within the Caribbean that can lead to female empowerment and gender transformative behaviours. Also demonstrated is the capacity and willingness of young women to empower themselves, hone and develop agency to lead their own lives, make informed decisions and positively impact their communities.

2. Overview

The SI Caribbean Regional Programme is working with governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) to prevent domestic and family violence by raising awareness, establishing and implementing laws and policies, and improving quality essential services for survivors of violence. Family Violence (FV) includes physical, social, sexual, economic and psychological/emotional abuse and acts of aggression within relationships that are considered as family connections or akin to family.¹

The aim of this consultancy is to support a girl-led methodology around girls' empowerment as a GBV prevention strategy. A key component is identifying girls' views on change strategies for their empowerment, reviewing promising empowerment practices and lessons learned from across the Caribbean, and developing and enhancing change strategies for and by youth and girl-led groups.

Violence against Women (VAW) in the Caribbean have been on the agenda of many UN Agencies.²³⁴ There have been several UN reports from the Universal Periodic Review process and the Human Rights Treaty Bodies that assess the rights of women and children in the Commonwealth.⁵ General findings from these reports are that the occurrence of GBV is very high, concealed and underreported in the Caribbean. It incorporates violence from persons who may not be related and includes rape and sexual harassment, with an increasing number of girls under the age of 25 being sexually assaulted.

The UNICEF Gender Programmatic Review of the Eastern Caribbean States (2019) notes that GBV is a complex social problem which is underpinned by male-female power relations and socially constructed gender roles that position men and women unequally. The findings in this assessment found linkages between the social constructs of males and masculinity and the incidents of crime and violence in the islands, and the ideology of 'asserting one's manhood and masculinity'.

The Review notes that there was increasing evidence showing that from a quarter to a third of children experience more than one type of violence. The data found that there is a spectrum of abuse that children experience during childhood. It also highlights that girls experience a broader spectrum of victimization than boys, including caregiver victimization.

During adolescence there was increased sexual violence for girls where the perpetrators in their studies were commonly reported to be other children, young people and males. In the analysis of data of 15-19-year-old adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean, it was found that there was a prevalence of physical intimate partner abuse for 13-18% of the girls. Further to this, 15-20% of the girls in ever-partnered relationships reported experiencing physical violence, with 4% reporting sexual abuse.

The UNICEF review also found correlations in machismo and gender socialisation and their impact on community gender norms and relationships. Their findings suggest that expectations around male behaviours shape dynamics in relationships and can directly influence violence that can impact IPV in parental and adolescent relationships, involvement in community violence such as gangs, and bullying in the school and peer relationships. Findings reported in the Global Early Childhood Study within the region have found conformity to stereotypical attitudes such as male toughness versus female vulnerability which impact relationship expectations and freedom of expression of females and young men.

Intergenerational relationships and influences were also highlighted as key factors impacting childhood experiences of violence and belief systems, increasing the risk factors for using violence against their own partners and children in the future. It was found that living in high risk communities with higher levels of violence increases the risk of violence against children, not only in terms of vulnerability within the community, but also within their homes and school environments.

It is recognised that one of the highest risk factors for Violence Against Girls (VAG) is the unequal power relations that exists between women, men, girls, and boys. Countries have adopted a spectrum of prevention strategies that includes initiatives to increase participation of women and adolescents in public fora. This has been done through the development and implementation of laws and policies towards increasing accessibility to education, social security, work opportunities, political participation and adequate standards of living.⁶

Without these initiatives, VAWG has shown to have serious consequences to not only the survivors, but society as a whole. There are direct impacts on mental and physical health of women and girls with the snowball effect of increased potential for depressive disorders brought about by prolonged stress.

Societally, there is impact on women's productivity and security, their potential for good health and wellbeing, education and psychosocial outcomes of their children as well as the capacity of the justice systems to proactively respond to cases of abuse.

Researchers have found that there is increased risk when challenging 'deeply felt traditions about gender roles'. Further studies have attributed this to the ideology that with low social and economic status, it becomes the norm where there is little need from men to enforce through violence, rigid gender roles.

Researchers have found that there is increased risk when challenging 'deeply felt traditions about gender roles'.⁷ Further studies have attributed this to the ideology that with low social and economic status, it becomes the norm where there is little need from men to enforce through violence, rigid gender roles. They also propose that with women and young girls beginning to challenge these traditional norms, there is the potential for an increase in violence within the home and communities.⁸

Despite the significant strides towards empowering women, there are still systemic disadvantages experienced by women and girls in families and communities. These disadvantages are increasingly recognised in women's economic empowerment, GBV and the rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH). There is increased importance in women and girls having power and control over resources to meaningfully participate in decision making that impacts not only themselves, but their families and communities.

With the increase in GBV programming across the Caribbean islands, there has been greater understanding of how violence is used as a strategy that keeps gendered hierarchies within the family and community structures.⁹ It can be seen that inherent inequalities can lead to unequal participation in households, social and health activities, and leadership roles. This further leads to limiting capacity in choices regarding age at marriage, having children and financial independence.¹⁰

The idea of empowerment has been put forward as one of the tools that can be utilised in developing strategies to counter GBV. Empowerment can be described as the ability to make choices; this entails a process of change and having resources available to make these choices. Kabeer (2001) has described empowerment as “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic choices acquire such an ability”.¹¹ Central to her defining empowerment, is the goal for people to reach a strong sense of agency, which is their ability to be self-governed and act on reasoning, beliefs and values that are their own and not prescribed by others. However, there is also the need to have socio-economic structures that can engage individuals to develop confidence and self belief.¹²

Klein (2014) claims, “[w]hile it may be partially the case that manipulating an agent’s structural environment, such as by increasing their education, providing better access to markets (like microcredit), and increasing assets, does increase levels of empowerment for many people, viewing empowerment solely through proxies can be problematic as it assumes that resources automatically translate into purposeful agency, which in the findings of my research is certainly not the case”. In this case, purposeful efficacy is not necessarily the individual belief to create the change but more so a collective, the dynamics of a community’s belief to make change.

UNICEF has defined adolescent empowerment as “[a] personal journey during which an adolescent (age 10-19), through increased assets and critical awareness develops a clear and evolving understanding of themselves, their rights and opportunities in the world around them, and through increased agency, and voice and participation, have the power to make personal and public choices for the improvement of their lives and their world.” (<https://www.unicef.org/media/101901/file/Adolescent%20Empowerment%20Technical%20Note.pdf>).

Empowerment can happen at two levels - for the individual where the girl is empowered to pursue her own goals, and for the benefit of their community or social environment. The challenge to adequately define adolescent empowerment as opposed to adult empowerment, especially with the limitations on indicators within the region to measure what it means for this age group, is specifically highlighted in this paper.



UNICEF (Technical Note referenced above) identified four key components that support the adolescent empowerment journey:

- promoting realisation, access and use of assets;
- increasing critical awareness;
- fostering agency; and
- enhancing opportunities for voice and participation.

Global findings looking at the intersectionality between gender and empowerment found that social determinants such as ethnicity, religion, social class and economy exacerbate adverse outcomes among women and girls.^{13 14} Evidence continues to support the correlation between women and girls' empowerment and economic growth, poverty reduction and enhanced human well being.¹⁵ Communities and community based groups are an essential element in creating stronger and healthier relationships, setting foundations for building networks that inform safety for girls within their communities.

Adolescents in the Caribbean region are highly influenced by the global societal changes that have impacted the expansion of secondary school education for girls, delayed age of employment and later marriageable ages; however, they are still highly influenced by their distinct circumstances and cultural systems that span different generations. These societal changes have influenced how adolescent girls evaluate social inequities and engage in daily activities. Flanagan et. al. (2014) found that when considering developmental changes occurring at this time, adolescents become increasingly aware of community structural factors that can limit their social participation and integration.

In a study done by Culyba et. al., there was positive correlation on the relationship of social support and natural mentoring relationships that develop within communities.¹⁶ The role of natural mentors within communities has been found to be important and more beneficial for adolescent overall health - mental, physical and emotional. It is important to note that empowerment of girls in communities should take into consideration how the social relationships outside the family can impact their identity outcomes. Drawing on community resources such as the availability of multiple caretakers including sports clubs, social and cultural clubs, religious institutions, etc., there is positivity in the interwoven relationships that support psychological, physical and economic wellbeing outcomes.¹⁷

In the Caribbean, this interwoven relationship between the family and community has historically been influenced by the needs, resources, cultural and traditional histories that have built cohesiveness and togetherness. It recognises the interconnectedness of systems and entities, and lends to the idea of social identity which is a key component of girls' empowerment. The technical note prepared by UNICEF's ASAP, Education and Gender teams, highlights this in their section looking at 'Assets' which was defined as "a valuable thing related to what a person can do or be that can be used to reduce vulnerabilities and expand opportunities." This includes resources, knowledge and skills that can be accessed to shape their lives and can be defined as competencies, circumstances and external resources.

There are different frameworks which seek to understand adolescent development and how we learn in a socio-cultural context.¹⁸ Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human development can be applied to understanding how children and teens acquire cultural values, beliefs and problem solving skills through community structures and intergenerational dialogue. His framework posits that community plays a central role in the teen's ability to "make meaning". The environment in which the individual grows up in, will influence how they think and what they think about.

Empowerment is a crucial component and concept to embed within any program that is led by youths. Many studies have shown that there is increasing potential for the empowerment of youths in terms of building skills and confidence through the establishment of positive partnerships between adults and youths as well as in the enhancement of social and community networks.¹⁹ There is a major intrapersonal component of how youths perceive their relationships to their environments and their ability to make changes. This includes how their self-esteem informs their confidence to make a difference in their communities in positive ways.²⁰ Research findings have continued to emphasise the importance of youth-adult partnerships in community programmes and the involvement in visioning, programme planning, evaluation and continuous improvements.²¹

In an effort to shape youth empowerment within the community, three components were identified:

1. provide opportunities for youth to learn about themselves in relation to their communities;
2. have an understanding of the resources needed to achieve goals; and
3. have an understanding of how actions impact outcomes. (Eisman et. al., 2006).

Karp et. al. (2020) developed a conceptual framework for women's and girls' empowerment in reproductive health.²² The framework describes the factors that influence empowerment and the achievement towards autonomy and choice. For the existence of choice, the key component is empowerment. The ability to make choices are affected by external factors such as power relations in families, broader community norms about women's roles, and by internal factors such as individual self-esteem and achievements.

They identified four indices that represented the dimensions of teen girls' empowerment:

1. Academic self-mastery which speaks to how well she becomes empowered by her academic abilities;
2. Perceived career feasibility which looks at the girl's belief that she will be supported to engage in tertiary education and independent careers;
3. Progressive gender norms looking at community norms around gender roles;
4. Marriage autonomy which looks at whether there is freedom of choice on when and whom they marry.

Community-based girl-led initiatives are imperative to inform decision making and programs that directly impact girls' empowerment journey.

Collaborative intergenerational relationships can be built and fostered in such a way that teen girls can interact with adults and gain skills for positive and healthy development, improving overall trust in community initiatives, academic confidence and improved wellbeing.

Community-based girl-led initiatives are imperative to inform decision making and programs that directly impact girls' empowerment journey. Collaborative intergenerational relationships can be built and fostered in such a way that teen girls can interact with adults and gain skills for positive and healthy development, improving overall trust in community initiatives, academic confidence and improved wellbeing. This relationship requires malleable roles that would allow different generations to demonstrate and develop skills and talents while NOT replicating the power imbalance that can easily develop in relationships between adults and teens.²³

3. Methodology

Sample Selection

A key component of this project entailed the evaluation and assessment of practices arising from the review of existing programs designed to empower girls and address issues related to VAWG within the Dutch, French and English speaking Caribbean.

The consulting team sent out emails and made phone calls to organizations within their wider network to organizations involved in girls' empowerment, specifically in the areas of gender, vulnerable populations and at-risk groups within the Caribbean region.

In deciding what countries to be engaged, initial communication with the community organizations for determining their willingness to participate in the focus groups, was carried out between 7th August 2023 to 25th August 2023. The final countries selected for the in person focus groups to be representative of the Caribbean were Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, and Sint Maarten.

The organizations selected for the focus groups in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Sint Maarten are established entities with fixed membership and fully operational within their various communities, having their own hierarchy and structure that worked with the needs of the community. The leadership of the groups facilitated the exercise by bringing their membership together to engage in the discussions. The focus groups were held in the regular meeting spaces or in community spaces which were made available by the participating groups. In St. Kitts and Nevis, the focus groups were coordinated by the Gender Division in the country, who brought the participants together and made all required arrangements.

Ten focus groups sessions were conducted with a total of 116 participants across the four countries selected in the Caribbean region. The focus group questions were targeted towards understanding how the participants defined empowerment, personal power and the intergenerational dynamics and interactions within each community which shape the understanding of VAWG, and the norms that can be used to create strategies for the prevention of GBV.

In addition, discussions were also held with a group of teachers, psychologists and social workers in Sint Maarten who provide support for the young women.

The meeting was set up by the coordinator of the focus group. It was an informative meeting where the context of the GBV environment in Sint Maarten at schools and with adolescents was shared. The group described their limitations and triumphs and made recommendations on how programs can be set up for the future, and on the required resources to make a difference in supporting adolescents.

Further to the focus groups, a questionnaire was developed to: 1) delve deeper into the themes within the populations of the focus groups that some participants may have felt reticent to share in the larger group; and 2) explore the themes within a larger population outside the organizations identified for the focus groups. The questionnaire was completed by adolescents from St Lucia, Barbados, Belize and Trinidad and Tobago. See Appendix II for the questionnaire.

The data collected in this study explored the larger themes of Empowerment and VAWG, with the target participants for the study between the ages of 14 - 24 years old.

Ethical and Safeguarding Considerations

In the fulfilment of the consultancy, the UNICEF Policy on Conduct Promoting the Protection and Safeguarding of Children was adopted. UNICEF's commitment to the protection and safeguarding of children was incorporated by:

1. Keeping professional conduct with demonstrated commitment to the protection and safeguarding of children engaged within the consultancy as informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Providing assistance on the basis of need alone and without discrimination against any person, in particular under the age of 18, including discrimination and other forms of punishment on the basis of race; color; sex; language; sexual orientation; gender identity; religion; political or other opinion; national, ethnic or social origin; disability; birth (or other status), activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians or family members.

For the participants in the study, the primary risk identified was associated with participating in the focus groups and experiencing distress when exposed to the questions relating to sensitive personal experiences; and concerns around if there were any consequences to participating in the focus group.

For each focus group, there was a psychologist present with over ten years' experience working with vulnerable and marginalised populations including girls at risk. The psychologist remains available to support the participants if needed. To date there has been no request for further group debriefing or individual psychological support.

Each participant received and signed a Consent Form (for participants over the age of 18) or Assent Form (for participants under the age of 18), in which the objectives of the study were explained and the reasons for the focus groups. For the minors who participated in the focus group, their parent(s) or guardian gave informed consent. The anonymity and confidentiality of the girls' sharing and opinions were guaranteed. Further to this, they were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the focus group if they wished. (See Appendix III for the Consent Form and Appendix IV for the Assent Form).

Data Collection

Face to face focus groups were conducted with the groups listed in Table 2. These were facilitated with a minimum of two professionals present from the consulting team and volunteer adults within the community who were mentors for the girls/participants. In one instance, a focus group was facilitated by mentors in the community, after a sensitisation and expectation session with the consultants. Focus groups were carried out between the period 20th August 2023 - 20th September, 2023.

The questionnaires were sent out to community organizations willing to manage the distribution of the questionnaires. The process ensured that the participants remained anonymous to the consultants as the community mentors shared the questionnaires directly with willing participants.

Data Analysis

Pattern based methods in the Qualitative Analysis of the data collected were used in relation to "Empowerment" and "GBV".

1. Thematic Analysis (TA) is a method of identifying themes and patterns of meaning across the dataset. The thematic patterns emerging for this type of analysis can be generalized to the larger population and can help in developing new theories on the patterns found within the data. Experiential TA was used in a focus group setting.²⁴



2. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focuses on how persons make sense of their lived experiences. It allows the researcher to explore the unique perspectives and meaning attributed to individual experiences while developing new theoretical frameworks based on lived experiences.²⁵

For the purpose of our study with the groups, there was the benefit of using both IPA and TA together.

IPA gave a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of the girls and TA was used to identify patterns in their interpretation of Empowerment and GBV that can inform the global meaning.

Table 1: Thematic Frameworks

Stage	Thematic Analysis	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
1	Transcription	Transcription
2	Familiarization and noting items and phrases that stand out	Familiarization and noting items and phrases that stand out
3	Complete coding across the whole dataset	Complete coding across the whole dataset
4	Searching for themes related to Empowerment and Gender Based Violence	Developing emergent themes in two stages: Coding for "empowerment" and "Gender Based Violence"
5	Reviewing the themes and creating a thematic map	Looking for the connections across the emerging themes
6	Defining the themes	Identifying themes
7	Analysis report	Analysis Report

4. Regional and Participating Organizations

The list below highlights some organizations within the region that are involved in supporting young women and providing empowerment through their activities. The list is by no means exhaustive and represents the ones that were willing to participate within the time frame.

Table 2: Regional Organizations

Country	Name of Organization	Brief Background on the Organisation
Jamaica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eve for Life 	EVE For Life was founded in 2008 in response to a dire need for support to women and children living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. E.F.L. acknowledges 15 years of clarity, durability, and light, while embracing the fragility in the lives of hundreds of young women and girls impacted by HIV, Early Pregnancy and Childhood Sexual Violations.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bluefields Bay Community Organisation 	Women within the Community who have been trained on GBV by the Government and other International agencies come together to share their knowledge with schools within the area.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Angelic Ladies Society Oasis and Hub 	Creating safe spaces for our adolescent girls and young adult women particularly those in State Care - equipping them to live God Fearing Lives
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Center of Jamaica Federation 	The Women's Centre Programme for Adolescent Mothers was established in 1978 in response to the high level of teenage pregnancy experienced by the country. In 1991, the Programme gained Foundation status, thus being named the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation (WCJF). The organization operates as a Limited Liability Company under the auspices of a government. The Foundation has since expanded to include 7 main centres and 11 outreach stations, island wide.

Sint Maarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funtopia and National Institute of Arts 	<p>Focused on developing innovative ways to keep youths engaged and stimulated through educational activities and learning the art of stilt walking. Creating opportunities to spread cultural awareness and build confidence through skill development while having fun through the arts.</p>
St. Lucia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering Our Women 	<p>Raise awareness on the prevalence of GBV and educate young women on the importance of leadership, empowerment, sexual reproductive health and rights, bodily autonomy, mental health while fostering community and women's rights regardless of race, gender, age, religion, caste, socioeconomic background, culture and sexual orientation.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The New Beginnings Transit Home (residential care facility for girls) 	<p>A temporary residential place of safety for children between the ages of 2-16 who are victims of child abuse and severe neglect and in need of care and protection.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upton Gardens Girls Centre (vocational school for girls pulled out of school) 	<p>A day rehabilitation center offering behavioral modification interventions to adolescent females. Provides psychological and therapeutically based programs that empower young girls and aim to foster emotional resilience and social competence.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls of a Feather 	<p>A mentorship organization with the focus of shifting narratives around girls whose lives are shaped by societal and systemic gender norms.</p>

St. Kitts and Nevis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of St. Kitts and Nevis, Department of Gender Affairs, New Horizons Rehabilitation Centre 	The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis facilitated groups coming together.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF St. Kitts and Nevis 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Gender Affairs Nevis 	
St Vincent and the Grenadines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Root SVG 	Healing and empowering our women and children.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soroptimist International 	Advocating for human rights and gender equality through grassroots projects designed to help women and girls achieve their individual and collective potential.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIWiL St. Vincent and the Grenadines National Chapter 	Supporting, encouraging and educating young women throughout the Caribbean on leadership.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girl Guides Association 	Educating and empowering girls and young women through innovative non formal education programmes, leadership development and community action.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marion House 	Offers the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Counselling services for individuals, groups, family ❖ Young Parent Empowerment Programme (YPEP) ❖ Programme for substance abusers ❖ Youth assistance programmes for youth who have dropped out of school, who are marginalized or 'at risk'



Trinidad and Tobago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NiNa Young Women's Leadership Programme 	The NiNa Young Women's Leadership Programme (Nina) provides financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills, and tools to build self-value in young women within the state care system and who are transitioning out of the system at the age of 18. The programme seeks to create a cadre of young female leaders in the Caribbean through training in life skills, leadership, self-belief and entrepreneurship.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict Women 	Financially empowering survivors of sexual and domestic environment through free training in jewellery making, business and conflict transformation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD) 	Established in 1999, the programme is designed to empower girls through leadership development, to foster lifetime skill sets and strategies of critical analysis and problem solving and to impact girls' personal career trajectories. It provides tools to help girls understand and capitalize on their strengths, to make positive life choices, to achieve academic success, and overcoming the barriers of sexism.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ryu Dan Empowerment Foundation 	A non-profit focused on supporting the social, education and physical development of persons in their community.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Princess Elizabeth Special School 	Focus on young persons who are physically challenged and who do not have access to the established school system.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tobago Jewels Girls Football Team 	Girls football team founded by females within the local community. Targeting at risk and vulnerable girls in the rural setting, the group focuses on girl empowerment, creating safe sharing spaces, enhancing support networks and promoting educational and sporting activities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Point Fortin Pioneers Girls Football Team 	Community group focusing on the empowerment and development of girls in the community who are interested in football. A holistic programme is run around the game with the idea of 'winning at life through sports'.

An example of two organizations with dedicated programs can be seen as Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD) and Ryu Dan Empowerment Foundation, both involving girls and women and embracing an inter-generational framework. Both organizations operate in socially challenging environments where there is ongoing gang violence and warring factions, and have committed to empowering young women to build on their innate agency and create the lives and communities they would want to enjoy. Their fixed programs involve girls and women of all ages.

About Ryu Dan Empowerment Foundation (RDEF)

Formerly known as Ryu Dan Dojo, RDEF is a multicultural, community-based non-governmental organization incorporated as a Non-Profit Organization under the Companies Act (1995) in 2013. It started as a martial arts school in 2012 to fill a void left by the passing of Martial Arts Instructor Shihan Carlyle Thorne in the community of Enterprise, Trinidad and Tobago.

The Foundation is dedicated to supporting the social, educational and physical development of all and is guided by its Seven Pillars of Community Development. RDEF's "holistic development" approach provides valuable life skills and personal development to its community. Its programmes focus not only on youth development through martial arts but also use the sport as a vehicle for change to address many challenges faced by the Trinidad and Tobago community.

The Girls Say Yes programme started in June 2022 with multifaceted training and mind-set remodelling, "It was designed to increase our pool of Peace Ambassadors amongst the youths from both sides of the warring divide [in the area of Enterprise, Chaguanas]. After six months, the youth participants understood that a peaceful coexistence is possible, and that their deportment and positive messages can foster community harmony and peace."

The participants, which included mostly girls and women, participated in netball, self-development sessions and art therapy workshops/social media messaging.

(Information provided by the Foundation)

About WINAD

WINAD offers an Inter-generational Leadership Programme which is designed to empower girls through leadership development, to foster lifetime skill sets and strategies of critical analysis and problem solving and to impact girls' personal career trajectories. It provides tools to help girls understand and capitalize on their strengths, to make positive life choices, to achieve academic success, and overcoming the barriers of sexism.

The programme facilitates family involvement and assists girls to negotiate their multiple roles, cultures and contexts. It offers a safe place to build on strengths of family, if needed, mediate family trauma and supports and celebrates girls' responsibilities to herself and her family in a way that will allow girls to be respected by themselves, their parents and families. Central to the programme is the creation of a safe space. This is an environment where girls feel free to express themselves and receive affirmation. It is more than a place without violence, and can include space to resolve conflict productively.

There is a deliberate strategy to build sisterhood among girls and women, with the programs supporting parents and preparing girls to lead and to become change agents and advocates in their communities. Girls are paired with an adult woman whose life work is around social justice. Girls are encouraged to make recommendations around the programme, embracing the awareness that there are no limitations, that they can change things.

(Information provided by WINAD)

Organizations which were part of the final study, their country of origin, the number of participants and the age range of the participants.

Table 3 - Participating Countries and Organizations

COUNTRY	NAME OF ORGANISATION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	AGE RANGE
Trinidad and Tobago	• NiNa Young Women's Leadership Programme	• 17	• 16 - 22
	• Ryu Dan Empowerment Foundation	• 19	• 15 - 20
	• Point Fortin Pioneers Female Football Club	• 12	• 12 - 19
	• Jewels Sports Club, Tobago	• 19	• 14 - 19
St. Kitts and Nevis	• Government of St. Kitts, Gender Division	• 18	• 14 - 22
	• Government of Nevis, Gender Division	• 6	• 14 - 19
Sint Maarten	• Funtopia	• 8	• Over 23
	• National Institute of Arts (NIA)	• 5	• Over 18
Jamaica	• Women's Centre of Jamaica Federation	• 12	• 15 – 16
	• The Angelic Ladies Society Oasis and Hub	• 12	• 15-16

5. Analysis of the Data Collected

Eight (8) stages formed part of the data analysis process. To examine the data obtained from the focus group sessions, a combination of TA and IPA were employed. After transcribing the discussions, the data was read several times to build familiarity with the content and subsequently coded. Following this, the development of thematic insights was initiated.

For each focus group, themes were developed, and descriptions written for the themes which emerged based on the experiences appearing from the different country groups. At the conclusion of the focus group exercise, the themes were re-examined, revised and refined.

The literature reviewed at the initial stages of the process was re-examined with a focus on Empowerment specific to GBV and VAWG. The different themes which came out of the focus groups in each country were revisited and refined to the final themes presented in this report.

By using a discursive approach in the focus groups, it was observed how the young women and teens reconstructed their experiences within the framework of their community and their experiences of gender norms from not only social and familial norms, but also through the learnt expectations from women of different generations within their immediate circles.

In the context of writing this report, there is mention of 'older women'. Older women as brought up in the discussions in the focus group was any woman who was older than the participating population rather than age specific.

The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained as there was no recording of the names or ages of the participants as they engaged. They spoke freely and from their hearts knowing that their contributions were not being monitored or linked to them as individuals. Therefore, in reporting on what was said, the countries from which they came was used as the identifying factor.

6. Emergent and Sub Themes

6.1 Overview

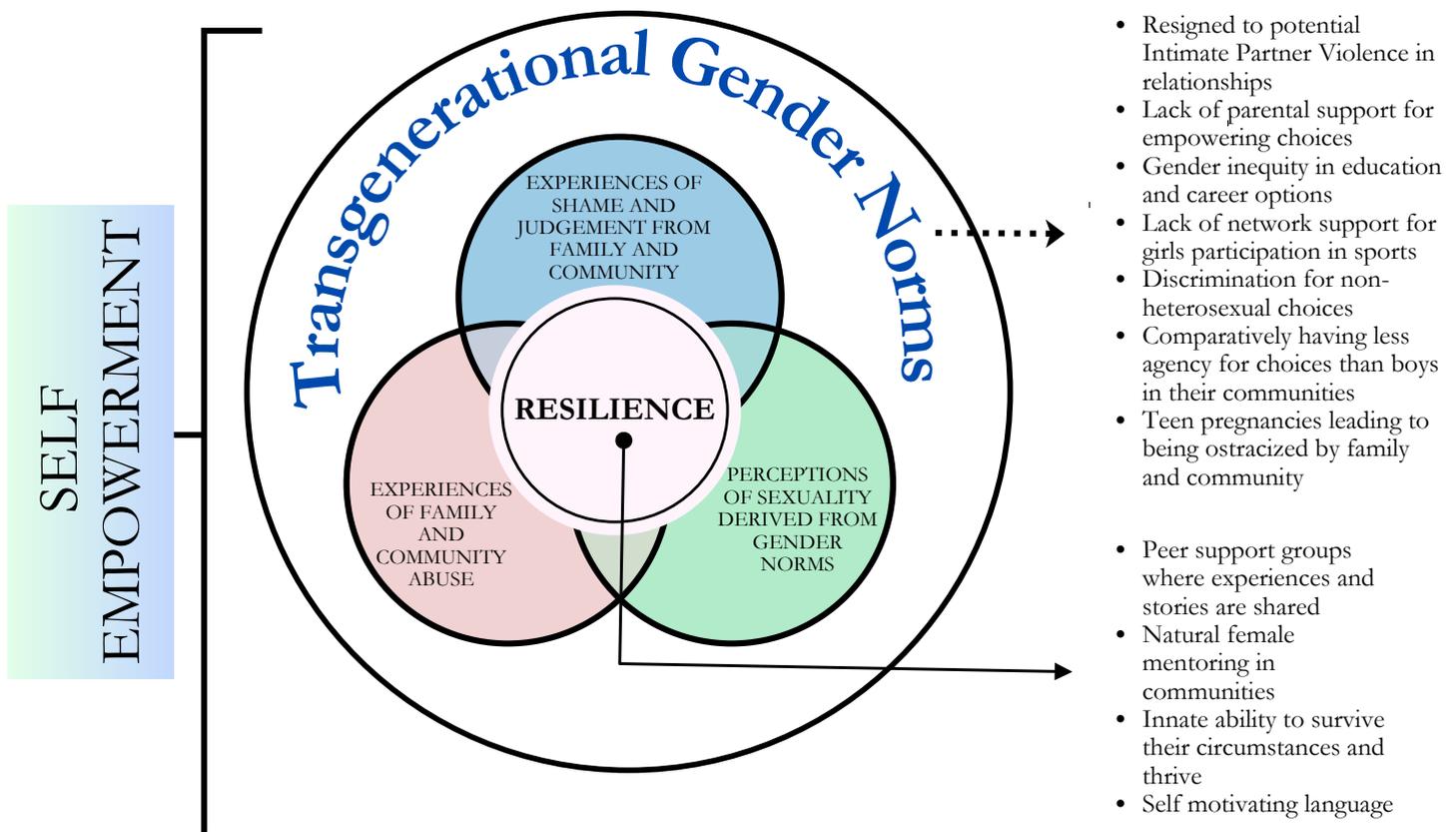
The analysis of the data provided insight into the dynamics and structures within the Caribbean setting that informs an understanding of how young women respond to GBV and define their own sense of power within their communities. There was extensive surfacing of transgenerational norms and beliefs which inform and influence how the young women and girls empower themselves.

The key emerging themes coming through the analysis were Resilience and Self-Empowerment. There were three sub themes which informed the experiences of the girls and their journey towards empowering themselves. These were seen as:

1. Experiences of Family and Community Abuse
2. Experience of Shame and Judgement from Family and Community
3. Perceptions of Sexuality Derived from Gender Norms

The sub themes were directly reflective of the experiences of transgenerational gender normative behaviors within the communities.

Diagram 1: Resilience and Transgenerational Gender Norms



The United Nations Gender Equality Glossary of Terms has defined gender norms as accepted attributes and characteristics of male and female gendered identity at a particular point in time for a specific society or community. They are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community.

Transgenerational Gender Norms are transmitted through different generations to create concepts of how males and females should be, laying foundations for a cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping. Butler (1999) has argued that the “script of gender performance is one that is seamlessly transmitted through the generations in the form of socially established ‘meanings’”. Additional studies supported this view that the social and family learnings of sex and gender related patterns usually occur from early childhood as an embodied, automatic and somewhat unconscious process.

The table below illustrates the Transgenerational Gender Norms compiled from the varying resources referenced in the Literature Review. In our thematic review derived from the focus groups, we have highlighted the gender norms that were identified and discussed by the participants in relation to their lived experiences.

Table 4: Transgenerational Gender Norms

Transgenerational Gender Norms (identified in the varying literature resources in the Literature review section)	The limiting beliefs as they impact girls and young women
Educational Norms	Lack of educational and social opportunities for women; Limiting options for further education for teen girls
Family Norms	<p>Only men make decisions on resources within the household; Men are the head of the household and have a greater role in income generation for the family; Women access financial rights with the permission of their partner or husband.</p> <p>Violence against women and girls in the home; Expectation of staying at home and taking care of a family; Expectation that the girls within the home would leave school at a specific age and work (either unpaid within the household or bring in an income to the home) until they are married; Biases that sons are a better investment for the family, granting them greater access to resources and educational opportunities.</p>
Cultural and Social Norms on Masculinity	Glorification of masculinity in the community is normalised; Women and girls are criticized, oversexualized and objectified; Women and girls are underrepresented in sporting and cultural groups within the community reducing potential opportunities and role models for the girls; Early marriage based on religious and family expectations.
Work and Professional Norms	Expectations of office dress codes and lack of professional development within company leadership frameworks; Normalised sexual harassment in the workplace without priority towards fixing this issue; Talent is directly related to gendered norms that young women are prohibited from pursuing aspirations and technical skills while using their education.

6.2 Resilience

Survival of their personal experiences and circumstances was a common thread within all of the focus groups. Much of the research around resilience has focused on complex trauma in childhood and adulthood. Few studies have adequately focused on adolescent resilience, viewing this developmental period as a phase where risky behaviours are expected. However, a 2012 study by Masten and Narayan found that there is increased ‘cognition and interpretation of experiences, emotion and emotional understanding, self-regulation skills, knowledge, social connections and relationships, physical size and strength, belief and faith, and many other aspects that could influence their interaction with experience, including traumatic experiences.’²⁶

The results from the focus group discussions supported resilience research in the intersectionality of gender norms and resilience²⁷ where connections with other young women and women of older generations gave them positive feelings and a sense of empowerment towards creating choices in their future and sharing experiences with peers.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...how we here for each other instead have a lot more females being there for females because especially in this 2023 are plenty social media fights within females neighborhood some fight with females...I think the best thing for female is a female friends you could tell them anything somebody they could trust could be a mother, your sister...”

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...I know someone who has two daughters. They don't have a mother figure, so sometimes when they have to go out, I will be there to comb the hair. Look, recently she monthly supposed to come and she didn't see it. So he came to ask me. It's not like he could call his mom or sister to find out well, how to assist her with it. So he will have to come by somebody else in the household and find out how to assist her as a father, because he don't know anything about dealing with pads and those kind of things. So he came to look for a female in the house to talk and find out well, how to assist his daughter...”

Participant from Jamaica: “...I think pushing like the motivation. Motivation. Words. Words, right? Encouragement. Encouraging you to do the right thing...”



Participant from Jamaica: “I think like the emotional support. It's called safe space...because we're all in the same situation...And you want a space where you can discuss that and share. Yeah, and feel safe. You know, no judgment where you are...”

In motivating other girls in the peer group based on her personal experience, Participant from St. Kitts: “...So, it's like, I wouldn't encourage anyone to get pregnant one time, have a mindset, build your goals before getting pregnant, reach where you want to reach before pushing about pregnancy...Don't let no man take advantage... I don't let no man feel like I worthless because I am worth it. Show them I worth more, Show them I am better than them, Show them that I could do without them even when you got to depend on a man for child support, nothing do it on your own because at the end of the day man could go, mother is sure fathers are made...”

While the core themes of Abuse, Shame and Judgment, and Sexuality continued to be consistent, what also came across very clearly is how much the girls continued to use language that was self-motivating and self-empowering. (As shown in Diagram 2) When they spoke of their futures, there was no indication of an intention to submit to transgenerational gender roles that pervade Caribbean communities.

Results from the focus group also demonstrated that there was a high level of self-motivation and self-motivating behaviors. Witnessing these girls and young women, it can be heard in their voices and seen in their body language that they are defying transgenerational norms in very subtle ways. They empower themselves in front of the mirror, being with their peers in safe spaces, and they create opportunities for mentoring other girls in these spaces. ‘Self-talk’ came up multiple times in discussion.

Participant from St. Kitts: “...I can do it. To me, talk don't help really. If you talk to somebody, sit down and talk, it will help. To me, somebody could talk to you, a talk to you, but it's just stuff...I can do it”

Participant from St. Kitts: “...If you have a say, you have a decision, you have a make, keep to that. keep to that point, don't let nobody distance you, don't let nobody degrade you from pushing for your want. So everybody should have a chance to do everything...”



Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...I have a session and session with myself. I sing to myself in the mirror every day when I wake up. On mornings, I'll go outside, view the sun, the grass. Thank God for being able to wake up and see this beautiful scenery...”

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “Sometimes we have to build our confidence for ourselves... stand up in the mirror... because the negative...is everybody sometimes your friends laughing and talking to you and wow. you wouldn't believe what's going on behind so you can learn have learned it...I don't wait for anybody to tell me I looking good. I know I looking good...”

From the focus group in **Sint Maarten**, the majority of young women were exposed to a work environment. Job opportunities for women were limited to the tourism sector with career paths in business or hospitality (as shared by the participants).

In sharing about women she is learning from in the workplace, **Participant from Sint Maarten:** “So I see how they are in their workspace, how they are making their voice be heard no matter what. You're going to listen to me because what I have to say is just as important...Which then it turns later down in life. Like for me now, it makes it that much difficult to do what you want to do because at the end of the day, I don't really want to work for nobody. But I don't have a choice. I am slowly getting into my entrepreneurial stuff. But it's gonna take me twice as long now because I have to break the mold first, right? Get out of that mindset, revamp myself and then slowly fund my own way into what I want to do. You know? So it's like it takes much longer this way. Yeah.”

Resilience continued to come through all the focus groups. The girls spoke consistently about their desire for reciprocal respect not only from family members but from all members of the communities which included older women who they know have been in similar situations, to the men and young men in their communities. Not only being respectful of their bodies, but also of their ability to be guided to make positive and enriching choices for their own growth.

6.3 Self-Empowerment

The Self-empowerment theme emerged from discussion around the young women's ability to motivate themselves and obtain the resources they needed despite not having the necessary support. In some cases, the girls experienced abandonment from family and community, withdrawal of emotional reliance and guidance from authority figures in their lives.

Reflecting on the absence of family and community support, **Participant from Trinidad and Tobago:** “Believe in yourself. Push yourself to be better, like so. Telling you that, and you get your preparation...I have animals. That is my experience. With that, I could be able to do whatever. When it is my duck pen breakdown, I had to fix it. If my yard need raking, I have to rake it. It yeah. That's the experience I have. Any hard work, in de yard, like to pick up gravel and cover up moderate properly, I have to do it. I did it...I have to do it. And I tell myself, put the maths together. This is what will have to be done. And I'll just do it. See if I need anything. I'll get whatever I need and do the job.”

Mental health support was identified as a luxury, and unavailable because of cost, access and stigma. Many of them acknowledged the need to have access to mental health, and assumed accessibility to it was limited, questioning whether that was due to their personal situations or gender.

In being resourceful to find the mental health support needed, **Participant from Sint Maarten:** “Like you're struggling. no-one's going to actually tell you that, oh but why you need to go and speak to this and this person for like, you fine, just talk to God. Like you know they always like that...but at the end of the day, you know, it's tough out there. They not giving willing information...that okay if you're struggling emotionally that there are options out there. It's not open. Like you really have to go and search and dig yourself to find it. There's no way you could just go and be like okay go on this government website for example and boom you have the list of all the psychologists you need...”

When proposing to the young women the idea of leaning on community members to get support and to empower themselves, very few felt emotionally safe to do this because of the transgenerational gender norms that are filtered in the beliefs held by community members. However, one of the groups in Trinidad, located in a high crime area, created a space which had different generations of women to support the young girls. From this group, **Participant from Trinidad and Tobago:** “...We're growing up in a society where we want to say we want to do but we don't have the support, we don't have the encouragement home... we tend to lose that support from home. So because of losing that support from home, and some parents are very strict. You can't go and you can't do it. You have peer pressure coming on from school, from your friends. You don't want to do it. You look for support outside. And by looking for the support outside, sometimes problems come about because they come from a different background.

So we have to find that support that we need, I think, got to build our confidence within...You start with that, and then you within yourself, have to look for someone that sometimes is not within your home, you have teachers, guidance counsellors, pastors within your own church...somebody that you turn to for that support, and you positively sure they are giving you correct guidance...”

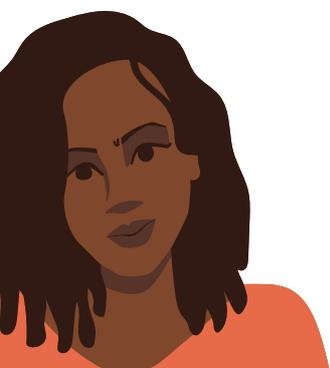
Self-empowerment was a thematic thread in all the focus groups in the 10 participating organizations. However, the analysis revealed three consistent sub themes that were linked to the ability of each girl to empower themselves. These sub themes stemmed directly from the impact of transgenerational gender norms revealed within the communities and ingrained in the behaviors of the girl’s networks - social and familial.

6.3.1 Experiences of Family and Community Abuse

In defining what empowers young women, it was found that there was a seeming lack of agency. The UNICEF Technical Note on Adolescent Empowerment defines Agency as the personal capability to act and make free and informed choices to pursue a specific goal. Agency is also considered an asset which is defined as a valuable thing related to what a person can do or be that can be used to reduce vulnerabilities and expand opportunities. It can therefore be seen as the girls’ own sense of power to make the difference they want in their lives. Many of the girls alluded to knowing that they don’t have much power in how they create their futures, while a few felt that they were capable of doing so. They were all aware of the different forms of abuse that women and girls experience in their communities.

In discussion, some of the girls also realized that their individual family experiences of neglect, verbal abuse and physical abuse resonated deeply. None of the girls shared experiences of sexual abuse in their home environments.

They also shared that because of their sex, family and community resources were not fairly shared as compared to what was done for boys/men.



Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...And that doesn't go for football alone, but for a lot of things where we have to kind of push ourselves on our own, it's not looking for the help from administration, federation, to, so they're already looking for the great players that they think, you know, already at a certain standard, rather to help create that standard...”

“...Women football is so much overlooked that sponsorship mainly goes towards the men and that's why they have so many leagues, they have better programmes, better equipment, you know, physical therapist, all of that they have put for the males, which is unfair.”

Participant from St. Kitts: “For example, when I was in high school, they had football and they're telling me, because you're a girl, you cannot try out for the football team...Their team is they want pure boys. They don't want girls...I don't want to be in an environment like that where you just like, everything them do is because you a girl... So I went to volleyball because I know volleyball is both boys and girls.”

Participant from Nevis: “I've seen boys, some stuff are only stuff for boys. Girls who want to try it too, but mainly for boys...”

In all of the focus groups there were discussions and reflections on experiences of engaging with older women in their respective communities. Many of the young women, regardless of which island they came from, shared that transgenerational gender norms had a huge impact on how they are perceived by their communities. The interactions described with older women were defined in terms of having values and beliefs many of the young women felt did not align with what they wanted for themselves. Instead of getting empathy for choices and mistakes, they encountered censorship from their immediate support networks.

Participant from St. Kitts: “...sometimes things are said about them - places that they are and it is not true. people in the community 'cry on them'. They make judgment on them even when things that are said is not accurate.” “So... So boys can do what they want...for girls, it's like they pay attention to what you're wearing and you have to do it with girls. And they'll be like, oh your skirt have to be a certain length because this and that...”

“...And the thing with men, they want to do you all sorts of things and when you turn around and do it, they can't take it. They can't take it at all. They want to call you down, they want to say, oh, you this, oh, you that...”

Similar themes around the expectation of abuse from men was found in the groups in Trinidad and Sint Maarten. The focus group results supported the literature that many young women who have little support from family and community, experience GBV and this is perpetuated by the social norms that are found in communities where men are not held accountable for their choices and their actions. They are generally applauded by their peers for having sexual relations with multiple girls. This information is shared in a derogatory manner, sullyng the reputations of the girls within their communities.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...Girls getting pregnant - So there is a kind of accomplishment, like, oh, yeah, I done have she, I done have the next one...”

Some of the young women alluded to it being acceptable when women are beaten, further highlighting how transgenerational norms create a continuous cycle of GBV influencing perceptions around the appropriate responses by men and women in intimate relationships. This was shared in one of the groups in Trinidad and from Jamaica.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...some women does look for their licks...”

Participant from Jamaica: “...Sometimes, but because men are feeling more trapped also, you have a question about women. So even though it's not right, you are justified...”

When talking about abuse within IPV, the focus group in Jamaica shared experiences around lack of police response when help is needed. They felt that situations needed to escalate to a place where it can be deemed an emergency before the police will respond.

Participant from Jamaica: “No, they will not come. They will not come...it's woman and man conversation. They don't get involved...They never believe it.”



They never believe you. It's a common situation like all the time..." Comments were also shared that sometimes the communities would get involved to call the police, however by the time there is a response, the situation is sometimes resolved, but further incidents can easily be ignored by the police. "Some people fast, they want to know. Some communities, they will come help if they can help. Some people will not come help, but they'll call the police. And it is a situation where they keep calling the police all day and you personally resolve the issue internally the next time, couple of next times when they call, they just never come and believe..."

Further to this, the young women shared that police response depended on a number of factors - the area where the calls came from, the dynamics between the police and the males in that area and the social perception of females within that community. They felt that the police assigned to inner city and low income communities treated girls with less respect as opposed to the treatment given to higher income families and communities.

Being judged when staying in abusive relationships was discussed in the Jamaican focus group. They felt that many women know that society is judging them, but due to circumstances and a lack of support they cannot leave the abusive relationship safely. **Participant from Jamaica:** "Yes, because that's what it feels like. They are judged...Most of them, and most of them don't know what to do, they don't know the situation of it...and the woman understands that they are being kicked, but they cannot do anything. They can't move on... Every time you go to a company, some man, them chop in on you also..."

Our results found that while some of the young women found support in community organizations that listened and provided a safe space, many of them felt that older women in their communities were judgmental and made them feel ashamed of their circumstances.



6.3.2 Experiences of Shame and Judgement from Family and Community

Emerging from the focus group discussions, the young women felt discomfort in the company of older women when living their truth. Many of them alluded to the views around religion and religious norms for women being used to control and shame them for their choices. Many of the shame studies that focus on teen years have found that there is a high potential for adolescents to experience shame because of the critical developmental stage in identity formation and their need to be a part of social networks. Experiencing shame at this developmental stage can lead to severe mental health concerns around issues of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, body image issues and social relationship issues.

Gender norms and stereotypes around women and girls' roles were found to be the basis for much of the judgment the girls experienced by their community and family members. In one of the focus groups the girls suggested that with the judgment experienced, their shame increased and they made unhealthy choices to engage in the behaviours they were accused of.



Participant from Sint Maarten:“...You know and they have this whole stereotype is if you out of what they see in a woman supposed to be wearing you are described as a H -O -E and that given like okay for now it given the woman more to do what they want and make they angry but before it was totally okay I afraid to wear this I afraid to wear it because I'm afraid of what people gonna say but now people don't care we're like okay you you want to call me that name I'm gonna be that name simple the stereotyping and the judging it really affects women especially if they're self -harmful you know there's overtake a lot them that leads to depression suicide so people have to really be careful of what they say and how they say it...”

Many of the studies around how teen girls experience shame have a social component which is shown in their interpersonal relationships and an individual component which becomes an internalized trait. For many of the girls in all the focus groups much of their experiences of shame was within peer, parent, community and intimate partner relationships.



“People judge us, judge us how we dress. But some people like long clothes and like short clothes. But at times, mostly they'll judge women with short clothes...how sometime you might want to wear on a short pants. and men will take it as that opportunity to rape a response as yes by clothes you're wearing...”

For many of the young women, the visual perception they create in their communities would often determine how they were perceived by not only men in their communities but also older women. Many alluded to not feeling safe to be themselves around older women even though they believe these women would have had similar experiences. The idea of what is worn, clothing and jewellery, would inform the community perception of the girls. These assumptions were based on norms from older generations, for instance, where wearing anklets, nose rings, or earrings had particular connotations. Girls were prohibited by family members to wear anklets for fear of them being labelled as 'easy' for men in the community.

“ —

Speaking about the culture of communities in St Kitts: “So, especially if you get pregnant, a lot of people just talk about it, with any community. Very much so...”

In discussion, many of the young women exhibited resilience in how they respond to shame and feeling judged by others in their community. Transgenerational gender norms were the primary contributing factor to community responses towards them and they were generally put into specific roles within the community hierarchy with different expectations for their male counterparts.

Participant from St. Kitts: “Girls are expected to get a good education and not have a boyfriend...Get a good degree...no boyfriend, be perfect, no mistakes... you cannot do what makes you happy. Can't do what makes you happy.”

Participant from Sint Maarten: “Whether their parents have money or not, some people, some parents just stick in the old ways of wanting . the girl to be purely feminine, pure feminine energy, no masculine energy. Like she needs to be the damsel in distress that has to be saved...”

Participant from Sint Maarten: “...And for mine with my Haitian parents, like the Haitian culture, it's Christianized a lot. So a lot of like their views is like with the Christian values as well. For instance, once you're like 18, if you're not in college or even if you're not in college, then you need to be at home with your parents until a man come and whisk you away and ask for your hand in marriage and marry you. Then you have kids and so forth...”

Conforming to gender roles and conditioning by older women in their families and communities was another factor that contributed to the girls feeling judged. They feared being abused and ostracized by their families and their communities if their actions were not approved. They felt that there was a lack of understanding from older women in the communities in their vulnerable moments. For the girls who had pregnancies before marriage, they spoke about being ostracized by their family and their community. They also shared that there were no consequences for the men/young men who impregnated them; instead it was seen as an accomplishment within the peer group.

In some communities there were also cultural norms that defined the options girls had within the family and the opportunities that became available to them through teen years. Some girls highlighted a patriarchal approach to family decision making where all the decisions were made by the men in the home - this included girls' education and career opportunities.

Participant from Sint Maarten: “...Because at the end of the day regardless, the male mentality is so old school. No matter what jacket they put on it today, no matter how old the jacket is, it's still an old school mentality that male are just supposed to rule...”

Participant from Sint Maarten: “...Not me specifically but I know from my sister. My father worked in construction and she's always been like a hands - on person and wanting to go with him and to help him out and he allowed her to do that but when she wanted to go into the carpentry career, my dad's a Haitian man. He was like absolutely not. You know, you write out a nurse, you're a doctor, or you have some other career that fits in the ideal Haitian woman perspective. So that's one thing. And he was fine with my brothers coming along and learning and so forth...”



Participant from Nevis: “...You know, some people like that are expected to do certain stuff because then of who you be, I must not expect you to go down that path. But in reality, you don't want to do those stuff...”

Within school environments, the girls expressed the need and expectation by others of conforming and conditioning. For young women that played sports, particularly traditionally male-dominated ones such as football and basketball, there were experiences of discrimination and lack of options. In addition, for those who expressed interest in pursuing higher education and technical subjects, there was also the experience of limited options “because they are girls”.

For the girls in sporting activities experiences of lack of support from the schools in promoting their skills, engaging in healthy competition with other schools, garnering school support from other students, and encouraging their abilities towards educational scholarships were highlighted.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...The focus is more on the male players because it has bigger needs for the year and scholarship. Mostly it means getting scholarship than female because so I find it unfair to the female footballers that trying and they not getting no results...Women football is so much overlooked that sponsorship mainly goes towards the men and that's why they have so many leagues, they have better programmes, better equipment, you know, physical therapist, all of that they have put for the males, which is unfair...”

For the girls who engaged in competitions and leagues within their country, they found that location and school prestige played a part in the distribution of resources to the sports clubs as well as the biases displayed by regional and international stakeholders.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago:“...[School], they will take all the good girls from south [of the island] and put into their school. And when they do that, it does mean in town [north of the island], [school] can play football and that's unfair...All of them take the good players...South teams cant even make it through to a semi -finals, knock out, nothing, because they're taking all the advanced skills and the players...”

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: "...but for a lot of things where we have to kind of push ourselves on our own, it's not looking for the help from administration, federation, to, so they're already looking for the great players that they think, you know, already at a certain standard, rather to help create that standard..."

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: "...Well, like... In school, they don't recognize the girls' teams in school...Like, the boys and the girls have a game on the same day and they only call out the boys game..."

Participant from St. Kitts: "For example, when I was in high school, they had football and they're telling me, because you're a young girl, you can't try out for the football team...They're a team is...they want pure boys. They don't want girls...I don't want to be in an environment like that..."

Participant from Jamaica: "...they believe you're not skilled enough to be on the field because you're a girl..."

Lack of options to engage in further studies or even having a choice in the type of academic pursuits available was also discussed and experienced. In more than one of the islands, it was felt that there were higher expectations for girls to excel academically despite the limited options.

Participant from St. Kitts: "Get a good degree. again. no boyfriend, be perfect, no mistakes, you can do it right now. You cannot do what makes you happy. Can't do what makes you happy."

Participant from Sint Maarten: "I find it's kind of like that within the school system on the island as well. Because a lot of the high schools, you're either doing business, like a small portion actually gets the opportunity to study like science section, and then there's hospitality. Right. There are only those three options. If there are anything else that you want to learn, you need to find somebody that's willing to listen to you, that's actually willing to give you tips and pointers, and then you go in that direction. But most of the schools, most of the island tip is not fully private, but semi-private high schools. It's business sector, science sector, or hospitality. Those are the only options you have. Right..."

Participant from Sint Maarten: "...I finished that high school, but I was 16. So I was too young to do the GED because the university here, you have to be 18 in order to do the GED...So then the only option, the other option I had was either to go into the workforce or to go down to another school that offered a higher diploma level, which is a CXC. So then when I went and did that, there was one of the counselors. She pushed me and another group of girls to take the exam, but we didn't really get as much information in terms of, okay, this is how much you need to get to get into the school. Of course, you know, you need to get like a 60 and over, but I really wanted to go into forensics. So the only reason I wanted to go to that school was because I wanted to do the science department. But because I came from a school that was predominantly a business school, they didn't allow me to go to the science section. I had to do business or I just had to come out of school. I wasn't offered the opportunity. So like right now where my life is going, it's not because this is how I wanted it. This is not what I wanted to do. It's just that this is what I was taught. So this is what I am good at. So this is like the direction my life is going with and I'm just going with the flow as it goes..."

The perception of women being emotional and perceived as over-reactive, and not able to make decisions was also touched on by a **Participant from Jamaica:** "I have a feeling that most in the workspace females are undermined because they are seen as the weaker gender and that they tend to have a lot of emotions based on their opinions and insights..."

The results of the focus groups across the different islands highlighted that the school systems impacted the way the girls were supported and seen. While it is understood that all islands had educational institutions that facilitated secondary school education for girls, in reality the girls experienced challenges in having their voices heard particularly around academic options and careers. For example, for the girls participating in sporting activities there was consensus of a bias towards support for male teams from schools and sporting authorities.

6.3.3 Perceptions of Sexuality Derived from Gender Norms

The results from the focus group saw two primary factors influencing the girls' perception of sex, their own sexuality and how society/men view them. Firstly, across all the focus groups transgenerational conforming to gender norms continued to be highlighted especially around sexuality. Secondly, girls are viewed as sexual objects very early by males (varying ages) within their communities.

Best described by one of the girls speaking about the transgenerational gender norms in the Caribbean. **Participant from Sint Maarten:** "...The beliefs Caribbean wise, they just stuck in the timeless era where you still should be home cooking, cleaning, minding the children, making the children, you know, and that's about it. You shouldn't be doing anything else. Like for me, that's the way it is. like all men still have that mentality. Even the ones that are being born today probably gonna still have that mentality because why, cause my mother did it..."

These sentiments continued to be expressed by the participants in the study. Their lack of control over their choices because of social norms and beliefs that no longer serve to protect them and empower them, but instead limit them within social constructs which leave minimal room for empowerment and personal growth.

Results indicated that perceptions from older women in the community informed the girls' perceptions of their body and sexual relations with intimate partners. It also contributed to how acts around sexuality create shame and judgment for the girls. Questions five and eight of the focus group questions (See Appendix I) looked at how beliefs impact the girls in their various interactions; and how stereotypes and societal expectations affect the girls' abilities to assert themselves in their communities. Discussion arising from these two specific questions brought up the subject of sexuality in most of the groups.

Participant from St. Kitts: "Because you could be walking around with a boy and... They're gonna show it to us. Oh, that's she man. She like too much man..."

Further to this, the comparisons around what is expected in the behavior of girls and boys from the older generations created the norm and belief that even if a man fathered a child and didn't support the child or the mother, the social consequence for him would be inconsequential.

Participant from St. Kitts: "...You've had sex with ten people and you is a whore...But for a man, it's an accomplishment like, oh, he's a girl's heart..."

Mentioned within the theme of Abuse, the visual appearance of the girls was an indicator of sexual availability to the men in their communities. This belief again has been perpetuated by transgenerational norms of how girls must present themselves and behave outside of the family home.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: "...People judge us, judge us how we dress. But some people like long clothes and like short clothes. But at times, mostly they'll judge women with short clothes...how sometime you might want to wear on a short pants. and men will take it as that opportunity to rape, a response as yes by clothes you're wearing..."

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: "I'm just trying to say that we find it difficult wearing certain clothes because of responses that we would get from the opposite gender..."

Participant from St. Kitts: "...I was going to say that the people in St Kitts, and with the certain jewellery, you wear, for instance, they will say, oh, we're not supposed to wear the foot chain, and foot chain we got means that...you're just a certain way, they will be saying 'that's a whore'..."

Participant from St. Kitts: "So... So boys can do what they want...for girls, it's like they pay attention to what you're wearing and you have to do it with girls. And they'll be like, oh your skirt have to be a certain length because this and that..."

Participant from Sint Maarten: “...You know and they have this whole stereotype is if you out of what they see in a woman supposed to be wearing you are described as a H -O -E and that given like okay for now it given the woman more to do what they want and make they angry but before it was totally okay I afraid to wear this I afraid to wear it because I'm afraid of what people gonna say...”

Social perceptions on applying makeup **Participant from St. Kitts:** “Oh, they're very sexual...”

Furthermore, some of the girls also expressed fear of attack and ridicule if advances from the males were rejected.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...You just have to ignore it. Okay. If you enough away from them, you know, you can actually say something back to them. without fear of them attacking you. You might say something back to them...”

Participant from St. Kitts: “...oh, you're cutting steak with a vagina. Oh, this old man. Or somebody don't, somebody don't went with you...”

From the results, another emerging theme was a lack of tolerance for individuals and groups whose sexual orientation wasn't heterosexual. Based on information generated during the discussions, it appeared that many of the girls were raised within strong religious structures which possibly informed the views they held and expressed.

Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: “...So, so I find that there's some parents does not want their children to join the football team because they are afraid that their girl child turn to like girls and stuff like that, so some of the other people might think that...”

Participant from St. Kitts: “...You can't say that you like girls. girls may like boys etc. it's an abomination...”

Participant from Jamaica: “...It's a stereotype that you may be a sports person...So if you're involved in football in particular, people look at you as gay... basketball as well because it's a male sport...”

The transgenerational social norms within communities directly impacted the way in which men (varying ages) perceive the young women in their communities.

Without the community holding the males responsible for the actions and behaviours towards the girls, it was very normal for the girls to experience sexual advances from the males and to feel judged whether or not they engaged with them.

6.3.4 Masculinity and Intimate Partner Violence

IPV is an interpersonal relationship between two people with a physical and emotional investment. Violence in IPV was a theme that was picked up in the different focus groups through the girls witnessing this with women in their family arrangements and in their communities.

Perceptions around masculinity within communities had direct impact on IPV experienced by the girls within their family structures as well as in their own intimate romantic relationships. Expectations about the behaviours of men and how men show affection to women were discussed within the groups. The girls also shared experiences of family dynamics that spoke clearly of witnessing violence perpetrated against the females in the households.

Further to these perceptions are the ideas around what represents masculinity for men and women in the community. The type of behaviours that are attractive to the girls and how their understanding of masculinity informs their own expectations within their romantic relationships. The emergent themes discussed above makes mention of gender roles and the norms that are expected in the behaviour for the girls, however, education and awareness around masculinity and normative behaviours expected from males was around overt sexual behaviours and violence against women and the girls.

In some of the focus groups, the participants were able to lead the discussion into how to navigate the concepts around masculinity to create a positive impact on girls' empowerment, speaking to equality in the educational resources that are targeted to ensuring awareness is raised around male and female equality, learning the impact of violence on future generations and creating a platform where both men and women all generations within the community can collaboratively learn and engage.

There was also the recognition that while young women are being empowered and educated on gender equality, it is also relevant and necessary to educate men in the communities. Participant from Trinidad and Tobago: "...Sometimes you need both male and female because the female support is one the male support is the next thing. The male support helps you strengthen yourself against the male we have out there, the female support help you strengthen yourself against the female out there..."

7. Supporting Information

In Sint Maarten, a meeting was held with a group of teachers, psychologists and social workers who worked with the participants in the focus groups. Coming out of this session, the stakeholders attending identified issues and challenges faced by adolescents on the island. Some of the key points coming out of this meeting were:

1. Many of the concerns experienced by girls go unnoticed by family members and teachers. Often they will be referred for behavioural issues but will disclose sexual abuse, physical abuse and psychological abuse. Many of their basic needs are not being met within the family home because parents usually have more than one job and the kids are generally left alone for a large portion of the day.

2. There is a stigma attached to mental health on the island and as a result even when girls are seeking help, parents will not take them to sessions. It was also found that there is the mindset that girls will grow out of their problems, whereas a faster response for mental health assistance was given to boys. Due to limited mental health resources, issues become escalated and the girls become a danger to themselves and others. In such situations, the police get involved together with mental health services. This is not viable as once the crisis is averted, the care for the girls comes to an end.

3. Many of the schools serviced by this group were public schools and primarily from low income households. With parents working long hours and multiple jobs, the girls become vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse not only by men outside their social network, but also their peer groups. One of the largest concerns expressed by this group is human trafficking of girls locally.

Also raised was the concern that some girls are encouraged to have sex with men for money by family members. Others are lured into spaces by friends who are compensated for bringing the girls. From this was the impact of these behaviors becoming a norm within the society and becoming more acceptable within their peer groups.

4. Teen pregnancies were also on the rise on the island with high infant mortality within this age group. It was felt that during and just after secondary school many girls get pregnant, potentially from a lack of sex education and health initiatives targeting this vulnerable population.

It was expressed that if there is an increase in support organizations for teen girls coming out of secondary school, it would create a safe space to share and get guidance needed at this developmental stage.

5. The cultural norms that exist within certain communities within the islands also limited opportunities for the girls. This was echoed in the focus group with the girls where based on their parents' country of origin, the cultural norms around conforming to gender roles meant that many girls weren't given the choice of furthering education beyond secondary school and would be expected to get married or stay at home and get a job. On the other hand, boys are afforded every opportunity to succeed.

Direct Quotes from the Group

“What I see in populations of the at-risk girls that we're talking about is that a lot of issues go unnoticed. Often they are referred to me with behavioral issues, so when you're extremely defiant or school grades are lacking. What I've noticed is then afterwards in the sessions, exactly what you said, you're dealing with traumatized population. There's a lot of trauma. There's a lot of sexual abuse. There's a lot of physical abuse, emotional abuse.”

“

...But there needs to be other resources where these girls can go, where they have a support system, where they learn other resources, life skills to be able to deal with difficulties that they have. And that's difficult. Or it's difficult for especially teens to find those resources. Sometimes they want it themselves, but parents won't bring them, or no one is available. to take them to these places so there is there is there's a ton of walls that I've noticed that these these girls encounter and often the issues start young but it goes kind of unnoticed when they're in elementary school and it is so if I see the amount of girls that get referred to me compared to the amount of boys like boys immediately get referred when they are showing bad behavior or they're showing the fight of whatever types of behavior...and I feel with girls it seems like parents teachers wait longer before girls get referred to get additional help. So we've seen more in teenage years where a lot of these issues kind of had the chance to be put to bed, but strengthens and so that makes it very difficult and then what I also see is a lot of younger females women went through these things and never got help at that those stages in time I have full blown personality the disorders..”

“

...it's public school majority of our students are from low -income households the children most likely most days have to watch each other at home, so there's no one to come and say hey you're gonna go see a psychologist plus it's a taboo so nobody's thinking about that... I just wanted to clarify so what you're seeing in terms of the cases you'd see majority of the boys coming in for treatment just offer help or support but the girls they get pushed to the side or it's delayed because I guess once a boy is getting trouble then they have to come in right away but once a girl is getting trouble yeah maybe they'll grow to that so you're seeing that yes many getting more mental health support even though there's a huge stigma attached to that the boys are getting yes so when once they get older I see less 16-17 that's kind of a switch I see less males but younger boys get immediately and I mean it's from the top of my head if I see 10 boys I'll see one girl okay yeah it's a big difference really a big difference so then you still deal with that particular stereotype in terms of mental health yes the girls will not get the support the males get...

“

“...If they express themselves to you. So they're kind of stifled at home. They're stifled at school with teachers. So they're going to find different outlets...”

“...But in terms of just the girls that you interact with or even. It's quite a number, you know, because even when I worked at one of our hello girls. high schools here. I mean by the time the girls graduate within six months you see them pregnant...Well eight months you see them pregnant after graduating... and we knew of one or two who were pregnant while in second form and then they allowed them to come back and finish up. So it's quite a number...”

“...And then when the young lady gets pregnant, she has no choice in terms of how she's going to take control of her own sexual health and what she's going to do next... encourage their children to have sex with men for money...there is a huge underground growth here. And we hear of it, but it's sensitive, so we can't really talk about it...”

““

“I had a client who was part of an investigation of a ring that was going around with Sable, and Martin. I've heard of client girls. I had a client who was raped by a group of boys because her friend lured her in...Where the girls are bringing their friends to be raped. I had two clients actually. So then when they come in to be raped, then that friend who brought them would have compensated for their role in the entire thing...”

““

“...And even with so many, because Sint Maarten is expensive, so many parents for low income homes have to work more than one job. I knew of a six year old twins at my school who were already participating in oral sex with their friends because mom is out, older sister is hanging out with the guys on the block and the two little girls are home and their other little six year old friends are at home and seeing things and then the girls are having oral sex...”

8. Girls' Empowerment in the Caribbean

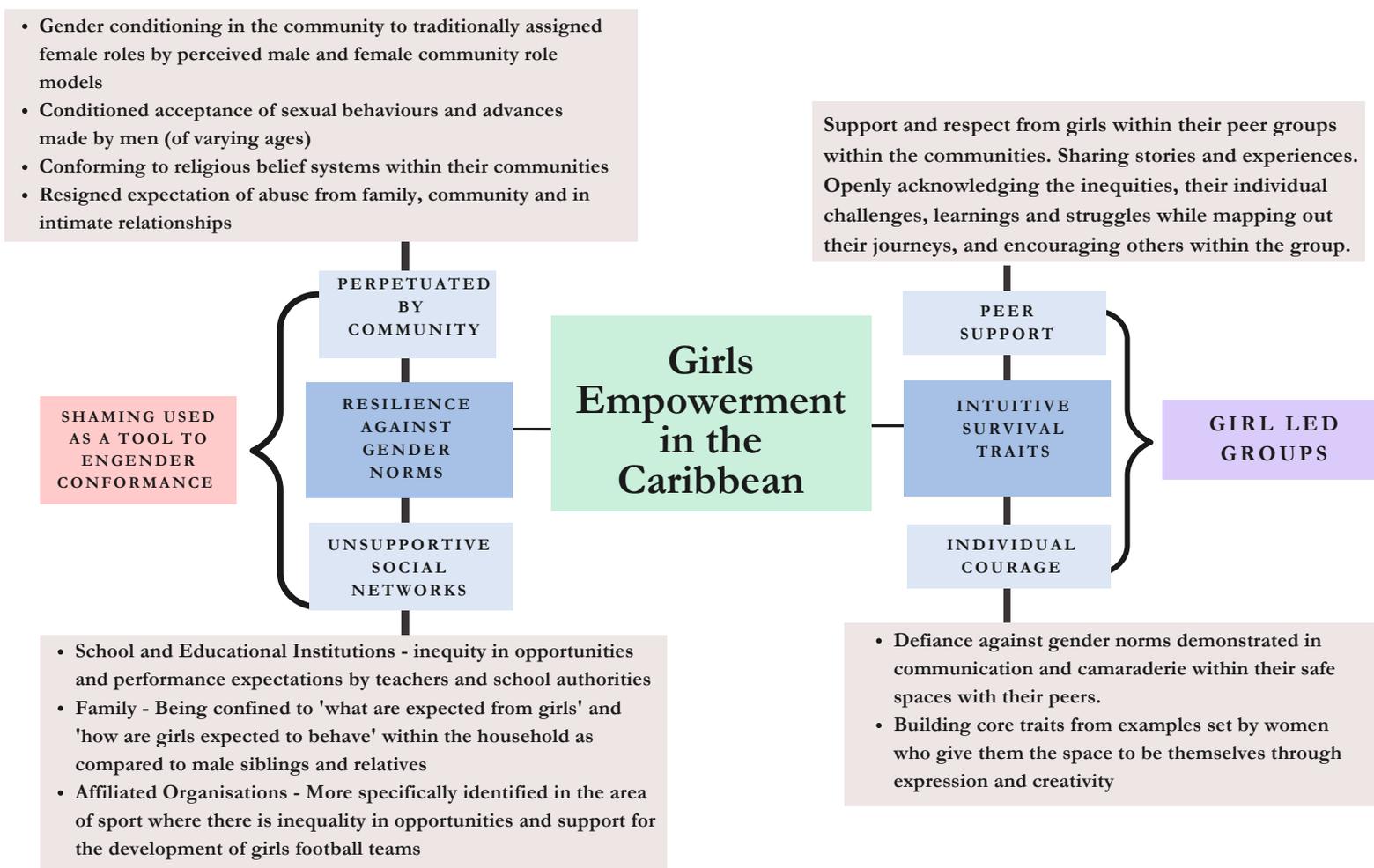
The data revealed that girls' empowerment in the Caribbean is a multi-faceted evolving phenomenon that is distinct in how it is exhibited in the actions and the beliefs of the girls who participated in the study. With the sample group it was found that the stories and experiences they shared were similar when it came to gender norms; intergenerational expectations from their communities and families; perceptions of sexuality and how sexuality is informed in their value and belief systems; and how shame is perpetuated by their communities. Their empowerment came through their intuitive survival traits, their resistance to social conditioning, and their individual courage and willingness to express themselves as freely as they could within the discussion groups.

The diagram on the following page (Diagram 2) represents how the study informs Empowerment of girls in the Caribbean. The two primary feeding factors are resilience and intuitive survival. It was noted that both are informed by the unique experiences of how Caribbean communities have developed over centuries. Resilience showed in the girls' ability to build relationships that encourage each other and help enhance and develop traits that can be perceived as passive, but actually create cohesiveness and loyalty for each other in their respective journeys. Their intuitive survival traits and ways of knowing mean that there is an awareness of what is fair and equal for them as girls within their communities. They understand the inequities that they experience because of their sex and they recognise that there is a disconnect with their experiences and the experiences of the males within their peer groups.

One of the key findings was the use of personal creativity as a form of expression, not only for lived experiences, but also as a tool for empowering the other girls in their peer groups. They inadvertently recognise that they have a unique form of agency that allows them to forge new narratives through expression - dance, poetry, spoken word, sport, engagement in nature, among others.

The role of creative expression has created a safe outlet that encourages the formation of safe and healthy relationships with other girls with similar experiences. It gives the girls an opportunity to be their age without the responsibilities that come from conforming to family expectations, and it helps in finding other female mentors within their communities who can support their aspirations and growth within a mentally and emotionally safe and available space.

Diagram 2: Girls' Empowerment in the Caribbean



9. Change Strategies for Girls Empowerment in the Caribbean

Expanding upon the themes above, it is crucial to recognize the urgency of implementing change strategies that not only address the immediate issues but also lay the foundation for a future where young Caribbean women can thrive free from the shadows of generational biases and societal constraints.

Purpose of the Change Strategies

The overarching goal of the programming and strategic initiatives is to equip, energise, and encourage participants to develop a personal toolkit that enables them to manage, endure, and prosper in their present environment. To simply become more empowered.

By crafting a program tailored to the Caribbean context based on the data collected, the aim is to address the specific needs of those who contributed to the research from various territories as well as, to ensure a distinct Caribbean perspective of both what it takes to engender empowerment and honour what is already happening within the region. Moreover, it is invaluable to amplify the voices and narratives shared by the participants throughout the research phase. This approach not only validates their experiences but also empowers them to play a pivotal role in equipping other young women with the skills and resources necessary to fortify their resilience and tap into their innate strength.

Additionally, the programmes developed aspire for participants to acquire insights and knowledge that will enable them to forge a life filled with boundless opportunities. These tailor made strategies and programmes will foster the creation of deliberate, hallowed spaces dedicated to exchange and education, alongside practices designed to empower them to envision and manifest the community they desire, to cultivate self-discipline, to reflect their aspirations in their actions, and to maintain personal accountability.

These programs have been conceived from the insights gleaned from the themes identified in the Regional Assessment, ensuring relevance and impact. (See details in Appendices)

9.1 Change Programs and Strategies

Table 5

Purpose of Programme	Description	Expected Outcomes/Outputs	Name of Programme
N egotiating transformative reflection	Girl led Groups informed and supported by women of different generations based in the community and outside of the community working together to shift perceptions of traditional norms. Creating new narratives to support agency and adolescent girls empowerment of youth in the community.	Peer mentorship groups led by girls with lived experiences, with guidance from selected women in and outside of the community. Women's Circles - sharing experiences and learnings.	Creating a Non-Judgmental Space for Empowering and Supporting Women and Girls: EmpowerHER Circle Empowering Resilience and Self Awareness: Building Strength in At-Risk Adolescent Girls : Thrive
I ntergenerational Community Interventions	Social Interventions with women and men to define/re-define cultural engagements; build life skills of empathy, listening, vulnerability, resilience; foster safe regenerative spaces that provide access to learning through the generations within the specific communities; and nurture youth resilience that empowers informed decision making and aligned actions.	Grandmother's Bench - an integral and safe spot for individual sharing between generations. Facilitated men and women's circles - to share experiences and ideas around the intersectionality between gender and violence. Life skills youth programs to develop empathy, listening, vulnerability and resilience between the sexes.	Trauma Informed Program that bridges the gap between men and women - Minding the GAP Creating a Non-Judgmental Space for Empowering and Supporting Women and Girls: EmpowerHER Circle

<p>Navigating social networks and platforms</p>	<p>Entrepreneurship programs geared towards building developmental opportunities; Providing equitable support and access through Community based organisations, national groups and School.</p>	<p>Capacity to earn and maintain empowering and self-sustaining livelihoods.</p> <p>An equitable relationship between national organisations that facilitate increased presence within these vulnerable, female communities.</p> <p>Equal educational opportunities that are girl informed and are not informed by limiting social beliefs and norms.</p>	<p>Trauma Informed Program to promote and develop entrepreneurial skills and female empowerment - Level UP!</p>
<p>Awareness and Wellbeing</p>	<p>Building on their individual survival instincts using tools that are nature based and life affirming. These tools cover mental health and wellness interventions; mind, body and spirit techniques; and creative expressions.</p>	<p>Trauma informed workshops targeting girls and their communities.</p> <p>Mind, body and spirit tools - yoga; meditation; mindfulness; breathing; nature immersion.</p> <p>Creative expressions - dance; poetry; spoken word; theater.</p> <p>Accessibility to sexual and health education, inclusive of nutrition and movement techniques.</p> <p>NiNa App - Journalling and trauma informed resources.</p>	<p>Empowering Resilience and Self Awareness: Building Strength in At-Risk Adolescent Girls : Thrive</p>

Conclusion

What has been established in the analysis is that all the girls experienced negative gender conditioning from generations of women within their communities. The girls' expressions show how transgenerational gender norms permeated their experiences in the areas of Abuse, Sexuality, and Shame and Judgement. The themes that were created from the collective results of focus groups in all the countries can be seen in the top box on the right of the illustration.

Within the previous discussion section of this paper are the girls' quoted words during the focus groups that describe their experiences in more detail. Peer support groups were integral in generating community for them where expression was safely allowed. These peer support groups include dance, sporting clubs, theatre, spoken word, creative activities, etc.

This study has generated many outstanding concerns about how much influence, both positive and negative, transgenerational norms impact the opportunities and choices that young women in the Caribbean region actually have. It demonstrates the need for intensive and focused programming and strategies around GBV and Empowerment that are not only targeted to this young population, but also to the different generations of men and women within the Caribbean.

Girls' empowerment in the Caribbean informs much of the current global findings on the intersectionality of Empowerment and GBV. There are unique opportunities for further research in the region as the findings suggest that while there are many transgenerational gender norms that limit the tangible and often easily identifiable components that make up the agency necessary to combat GBV, the generation of girls in the communities have found ways to empower themselves in spite of their circumstances. The Regional Assessment underscores the significance of adolescent girls' empowerment as a key factor in addressing GBV and VAWG in the Caribbean. The resilience and fortitude demonstrated by the participants have enriched the development and goals of these programs with their voices and narratives.

In light of the identified themes, the inclusion of males in dialogues about female empowerment is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and efficacious approach to gender equality. Engaging boys and young men in conversations and activities centred on female empowerment cultivates a deeper understanding of gender dynamics, paving the way for a society where both genders can flourish.

Additionally, confronting and dismantling transgenerational judgments among women is imperative for nurturing female empowerment and resilience. By challenging these entrenched patterns, we can establish a supportive atmosphere that not only empowers women but also bolsters their resilience. The programs are designed to create a secure educational space that fosters a collective sense of strength and empowerment. Moreover, cultivating a space that enhances one's entrepreneurial abilities and self-awareness is essential to the overarching aim.

It is believed that these programs and strategies will bolster the empowerment of adolescent girls in the Caribbean.



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Endnotes

1 Family Violence includes physical, social, sexual, economic and psychological/emotional abuse and acts of aggression within relationships that are considered as family connections or akin to family. The definition is guided by domestic violence legislation across the Caribbean region. The Spotlight Initiative recognizes that family violence is a form of gender-based violence in which women and girls are disproportionately the victims.

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Appendices

Appendix I - Focus Group Questions

1. How do you feel about the way girls are treated in society, especially when it comes to having a say in important decisions?
2. Have you ever witnessed or experienced situations where girls are not given equal opportunities to showcase their abilities and skills? If yes, could you please share an example?
3. Can you think of any instances where you felt someone was trying to control or limit your choices simply because you are a girl?
4. What kind of support do you think girls need to overcome obstacles and reach their full potential?
5. How do you think beliefs influence the way girls are treated in different settings, such as school, family, or the workplace?
6. Can you describe a time when you felt confident to stand up against unfair treatment or inequality? What made you feel that way?
7. In your opinion, what actions can individuals or groups take to create a more supportive environment for girls, where they feel encouraged to express themselves?
8. How do you think societal expectations and stereotypes affect girls' abilities to assert themselves and make their voices heard?
9. Have you ever felt pressured to conform to certain roles or expectations? How did it make you feel, and how did you respond?
10. What does having a sense of personal power mean to you? How do you think it can impact your life and the lives of other girls?

Appendix II – Focus Group Guide

- Welcome and opening remarks from the leader of the focus group
- Opening remarks from lead consultant explaining the exercise and the process
- Thank persons for making themselves available
- Explain the Consent and Assent Forms
- Read the forms for participants
- Invite them to ask questions if necessary
- Inform persons that there was no need to identify themselves by name or age as they made their contributions
- Advise of resource persons to talk to if required, the right to not participate, and the option to withdraw at any time
- Ask each question
- At the end, thank persons for participating
- Remind them about the professional resources available to them.
- Do a closing grounding activity

Appendix III - Questionnaire

- 1.What are some challenges or inequalities that you think girls or women face in society today?
- 2.How important do you think it is for girls to have equal opportunities and rights?
- 3.Have you ever witnessed or experienced any form of unfair treatment or discrimination based on your gender? If yes, can you describe the situation?
- 4.How do you think society's expectations and stereotypes about girls and women can impact their confidence and self-esteem.
- 5.In your opinion, what can be done to create a more inclusive environment for girls and women in your country?
- 6.Have you ever heard of or been involved in any initiatives or projects that aim to boost and encourage girls and women? If yes, can you share your experience?
- 7.How do you think education can play a role in strengthening girls and women?
- 8.Do you think it is important for girls and women to have access to resources and support systems that can help them overcome challenges and achieve their goals? Why or why not? What type of support systems would you suggest?
- 9.Can you think of any positive role models or examples of girls or women who have made a significant impact in their communities or society? How do you think they have contributed overall in society.
- 10.Have you or anyone you know been exposed to or suffered from violence mainly because they were a woman? If so please describe.
- 11.What do you believe are the contributing factors that expose women to violence and abuse?
- 12.In your opinion what do you think female empowerment is?

Appendix IV - Consent Form



Informed Consent – Nina Young Women’s Leadership Programme

Organization:

Contact:

Purpose

This study investigates the participants’ opinions on Girls’ Empowerment. As part of this study, you are being asked to participate in a focus group and answer structured and open-ended questions. The focus group will take approximately ninety minutes.

Participants’ Rights

I understand that my responses will be kept in the strictest of confidence and will be available only to the researcher. No one will be able to identify me when the results are reported, and my name will not appear anywhere in the written report. I also understand that I may skip any questions that I do not wish to answer. I understand that the Consent Form will be kept separate from the data records to ensure confidentiality. I may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. I agree to have my verbal responses tape-recorded and transcribed for further analysis with the understanding that my responses will not be linked to me personally in any way. After the transcription is completed and the project is finalised the tape recordings will be destroyed.

I understand that upon completion, I will be given full explanation of the study.

I understand that I am participating in a study of my own free will.

I understand that I am not to share other people’s identities or responses from the focus group with others outside of the focus group to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Consent to Participate

I acknowledge that I am at least eighteen years old, and that I understand my rights as a research participant as outlined above. I acknowledge that my participation is fully voluntary.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix V -Assent Form



Assent Form – Nina Young Women’s Leadership Programme

Organization:

Contact:

Purpose

This study investigates the participants’ opinions on Girls’ Empowerment. As part of this study, you are being asked to participate in a focus group and answer structured and open-ended questions. The focus group will take approximately ninety minutes.

Participants’ Rights

I understand that my responses will be kept in the strictest of confidence and will be available only to the researcher. No one will be able to identify me when the results are reported, and my name will not appear anywhere in the written report. I also understand that I may skip any questions that I do not wish to answer. I understand that the Assent Form will be kept separate from the data records to ensure confidentiality. I may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. I agree to have my verbal responses tape-recorded and transcribed for further analysis with the understanding that my responses will not be linked to me personally in any way. After the transcription is completed and the project is finalised the tape recordings will be destroyed.

I understand that upon completion, I will be given full explanation of the study.

I understand that I am participating in a study of my own free will.

I understand that I am not to share other people’s identities or responses from the focus group with others outside of the focus group to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Print Name: _____

Guardian/Mentor Assent for participants under the age of 18

I, have permission from the parents of the named individual to give assent for participation in the current focus group. I hereby assent and agree, individually and as a Guardian/Mentor to all the terms and provisions above.

Mentor Signature _____

Date _____

Print Name _____

Telephone contact _____

Appendix VI – Change Strategies and Programs for Adolescent Girls in the Caribbean

Program Outlines and Objectives

Programmes listed below are concise outlines and objectives. (Toolkit will further expand the programme activities). Programmes can be adjusted in terms of time and duration to meet the needs of the population. Each programme is aimed to cater to girls 13-26 who are at risk, have been victims of abuse, but also can be used for girls in a general sense.

Programmes

1. Creating a Non Judgemental Space for Empowering and Supporting Women and Girls

The program “EmpowerHER Circle” is designed to create a non-judgmental space that fosters empowerment and support for women and girls. We propose the establishment of a non-judgmental space specifically designed for women and girls, aiming to provide support, empowerment, and encourage a sense of womanhood. This space will serve as a safe haven, fostering connection, understanding, and personal growth. This programme will further seek to bridge the generational gap and create a sense of understanding for young woman who are at risk for seeking emotional comfort due to unhealthy familial bonds and Attachment.

Program Outline:

1. Welcome and Introduction: Participants are welcomed into a safe and inclusive environment where they can express themselves freely.
2. Setting the Tone: Establishing ground rules for respect and confidentiality to ensure a non-judgmental space.
3. Sharing Stories: Encouraging participants to share their experiences and listen to others, fostering empathy and understanding.

- **Skill-Building Workshops:** Conducting sessions on various topics such as leadership, communication, and self-care to build confidence and capabilities.
- **Mentorship and Networking:** Connecting participants with mentors and peers to create a supportive community.

6. **Action Planning:** Assisting participants in creating personal action plans to apply what they've learned and achieve their goals.

7. **Reflection and Feedback:** Providing opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences and offer feedback for program improvement.

Program Objectives:

To provide a supportive space where women and girls can discuss issues without fear of judgement or stigma¹.

To empower participants with knowledge and skills that enhance their personal and professional development².

To promote resilience and self-efficacy among participants, enabling them to navigate life's challenges with confidence¹.

To encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences, enriching the collective wisdom of the group².

To inspire participants to become advocates for change in their communities, contributing to a more equitable society¹.

To facilitate the development of strong networks that offer ongoing support and opportunities for collaboration².

“EmpowerHER Circle” aims to be a transformative experience that not only uplifts individual participants but also creates ripples of positive change throughout the Caribbean community.

2. The “Minding the GAP” program is a trauma-informed initiative designed to bridge the gender gap and combat gender-based violence. Here is an outline and the objectives of the program:

Program Outline:

Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care: Educating participants about the principles of trauma-informed care, including safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.

Understanding Gender-Based Violence: Exploring the root causes and impacts of gender-based violence on individuals and communities.

Building Bridges: Facilitating dialogues between men and women to foster understanding and empathy.

Empowerment Workshops: Conducting sessions focused on self-esteem, assertiveness, resilience and inner strength.

Skill Development: Offering training in conflict resolution, communication, and leadership.

Community Engagement: Involving community leaders and stakeholders in the conversation to create a supportive environment.

Support Services: Providing access to counselling, legal aid, and other support services for survivors of gender-based violence.

Action Planning: Assisting participants in developing strategies to address gender-based violence in their communities.

Program Objectives:

- To create a safe and supportive environment where participants can learn about and discuss issues related to gender-based violence without judgement.
- To educate both men and women about the effects of trauma and how it relates to gender-based violence.
- To promote gender equality by addressing the social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to the gender gap.
- To empower participants with the skills and knowledge needed to advocate for themselves and others.
- To foster collaboration and understanding between genders to work towards a more equitable society.
- To provide survivors of gender-based violence with the resources and support necessary to heal and rebuild their lives.
- To engage community members in efforts to prevent gender-based violence and support gender equality initiatives.

“Minding the GAP” aims to be a comprehensive program that not only addresses the immediate needs of survivors but also works to create long-term change in attitudes and behaviours towards gender equality and violence prevention.

3. The “Level UPI!” programme is a trauma-informed initiative aimed at promoting entrepreneurial skills and empowering women. Here is an outline and the objectives of the program:

Program Outline:

1. Introduction to Entrepreneurship: Providing a foundational understanding of entrepreneurship, including the mindset and skills required to start and run a business.
2. Trauma Awareness: Educating participants on the impact of trauma on personal and professional life, and how to navigate entrepreneurial challenges with this understanding.
3. Business Skills Workshops: Offering practical workshops on business planning, marketing, finance, and operations.
4. Personal Development: Focusing on self-esteem, confidence-building, and overcoming barriers to success.
5. Mentorship and Networking: Connecting participants with successful entrepreneurs for guidance and support.
6. Access to Resources: Providing information on funding, legal advice, and other resources necessary for starting a business.
7. Resilience Training: Teaching strategies to build resilience and cope with setbacks in business and life.
8. Pitch Practice: Giving participants the opportunity to develop and present their business ideas to potential investors or partners.

Program Objectives:

- To empower women with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue entrepreneurship as a viable career path.
- To create a supportive environment where women can learn and grow without fear of judgement or stigma.
- To encourage the development of innovative business ideas that can contribute to the local economy and community.
- To provide tools and strategies for managing the emotional and psychological effects of trauma in a business context.
- To foster a network of like-minded individuals who can support each other in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

- To promote gender equality by equipping women with the skills to succeed in traditionally male-dominated industries.
- To inspire participants to become role models and leaders in their communities, advocating for women's rights and opportunities.

“Level UP!” is designed to be a transformative experience that not only teaches practical business skills but also addresses the underlying issues that may hinder women's success in the entrepreneurial world.

4. The “Thrive” program is designed to empower resilience and self-awareness, focusing on building strength in at-risk adolescent girls. Here is an outline and the objectives of the program:

Program Outline:

1. Introduction to Self-Awareness: Educating participants about the importance of self-awareness and its role in personal development.
2. Resilience Workshops: Engaging in activities that foster resilience, such as storytelling, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques.
3. Emotional Intelligence: Teaching participants how to identify, understand, and manage their emotions effectively.
4. Healthy Relationships: Discussing the characteristics of healthy relationships and how to establish boundaries.
5. Creative Expression: Providing opportunities for participants to explore their creativity through art, writing, or other mediums.
6. Mentorship: Connecting participants with mentors who can provide guidance and support.
7. Community Projects: Encouraging participants to get involved in community service projects to build a sense of purpose and connection.
8. Goal Setting: Assisting participants in setting and achieving personal goals.

Program Objectives:

- To enhance the self-awareness and emotional intelligence of at-risk adolescent girls, enabling them to understand and regulate their emotions.
- To develop resilience in participants, equipping them with the skills to cope with adversity and bounce back from challenges.
- To promote self-efficacy and confidence, empowering girls to take control of their lives and make positive choices.
- To foster a supportive community where participants can share experiences and learn from one another.
- To provide a platform for creative expression, allowing girls to discover and express their unique identities.
- To create opportunities for mentorship and role modelling, offering guidance and inspiration for personal growth.
- To encourage active participation in community projects, enhancing social responsibility and civic engagement.
- To assist in goal setting and achievement, helping participants to envision and work towards a brighter future.

“Thrive” aims to be a comprehensive program that not only supports the personal growth of at-risk adolescent girls but also contributes to their empowerment and the development of a resilient community.

Target Audience:

This workshop is specifically designed for at-risk teenage girls between the ages of [14 to 22]. It will benefit girls who may be facing challenges such as poverty, trauma, family instability, limited educational opportunities, or involvement in risky behaviours.