

Minister on domestic violence: 965 distress calls in one year

ANNA-LISA PAUL

The national domestic violence hotline recorded 965 distress calls from people claiming to be victims of domestic violence between October 2014 and September 2015.

Of this number, 86.8 per cent of the callers were female.

Delivering the feature address at the launch of the information fair and exhibition in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women at the Brian Lara Promenade, Port-of-Spain, yesterday, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, Ananna Webster-Roy, described the number as alarming.

She said over 6,200 client calls were received between October 2010 to September 2015.

However, she said, while those numbers were recorded as a result of those who had garnered the courage to stand up, there were thousands more who had not plucked up the courage to make that life-changing call.

In an attempt to educate people on the opportunities available to them to escape from situations of domestic violence, Webster-Roy's division has pledged to ensure the rights of each citizen were not compromised.

Revealing that the People's National Movement intended to establish and enforce appropriate legislation, as well as facilitate easy access to all supportive

services and empower persons on their rights, Webster-Roy said they also intended to carry out several gender-research studies; facilitate the full and equal participation of men and women in the development process and policy formation and place the needs of the professional woman and mother at the top of the list.

Set to kick off a series of activities spanning the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, the division of the Prime Minister's Office endorsed the call by the United Nations General Secretary for the 25th day of each month to be celebrated as Orange Day.

Webster-Roy explained that orange was a bright and optimistic colour which represented a future free of violence.

Echoing the minister's sentiments, permanent secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister and head of the Public Service, Sandra Jones, admitted that violence against women and girls in the society was a challenge for the authorities.

Claiming that the magnitude of the problem was still unknown, she said the varying degrees of abuse were seen in the situations in homes, schools and communities.

Both Jones and Webster-Roy agreed that focus also needed to be paid to young men and boys in an effort to reduce the recurrence of domestic violence and acts of bullying which were currently being displayed.



Among the agencies that were present yesterday were Families In Action, the Victim and Witness

Support Unit, the Rape Crisis Society, Children's Authority, Child Line, Men Against Violence Against

Women, Young Men's Christian Association and Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women.

Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister, Ananna Webster-Roy, second from right, tours a booth during yesterday's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women launch of its roving community caravan on the Brian Lara Promenade, Port-of-Spain. PHOTO: MARCUS GONZALES