

# The scourge of Domestic Violence

IN MANY ways, the work of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) centres on protecting our human rights and advocating for dignity and respect for all members of society.

Eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for all, points to the Bill of Rights in our constitution and the protection of our individual rights and freedoms.

It is one of the reasons the EOC is involved in human rights work that supports sex and gender equality, which is a fundamental human right and an ideal to which most nations of the world aspire.

For a number of years, the commission has suggested its role in society is best suited as a National Human Rights Institute.

The EOC continues to advocate for sex and gender justice through our partnership with TTT to produce a television series entitled, "Sex and Prejudice," which looked at discrimination based on sex and gender and further, dug deeper into the sources of this discrimination to raise awareness and purport solutions.

International Women's Day is also a fixed and significant day on the EOC's calendar.

The commission joins human rights advocates to observe International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25.

The day aims to foster awareness globally and call for action to prevent



and eliminate violence by promoting advocacy, as well as creating avenues for discussion on the challenges faced and recommended solutions.

This year's theme is "UNiTE! Activism To End Violence Against Women and Girls." The aim is to mobilise all networks to join forces in addressing the issue.

Early human rights law enacted by the United Nations is relevant to Domestic Violence (DV).

The International Bill of Human Rights consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and its implementing covenants, articulate the State's duty to protect fundamental human rights that are commonly infringed in DV cases – the right to life, the right to physical and mental integrity, the right to equal protection of the laws and the right to be free from discrimination – while not explicitly addressing DV.

DV is a unique crime that demands innovation from the legislative system, the judicial system and from community partners.

The progressive nature of DV, which

tends to become more and more violent with each incident, underscores legislation should foster proactive approaches to this form of crime.

The TTPS received more than 6,000 DV reports over the period March 2020 to March 2022 and since the outbreak of covid, DV intensified.

Notwithstanding this, most victims remain silent, and violations remain unreported due to embarrassment or fear thus, as alarming as the statistics are, they do not accurately reflect the urgency of the situation.

The commission recognises DV as an endemic problem in TT and has been committed to advocating for improvement in the DV response pursuant to its mandate under section 27(c) of the Equal Opportunity Act ("EOA") by keeping under review the working of the EOA and any relevant law. First passed in 1991 and amended in 1999, the Domestic Violence Act Chap. 45:56 is a progressive piece of legislation which aims to provide protection for victims of DV.

Notwithstanding this, the EOC has been collaborating with various institutions to highlight the need for legislative amendments to the DV Act to ensure that zero tolerance is adopted, further protection for victims and higher efficiency in enforcement, the need for prevention and punishment of DV, strengthening the engagement between the key players and their work on DV related matters and playing its part in eliminating the scourge of DV.