

A STUDY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG YOUNG SINGLE WOMEN DUE TO COVID-19 STAY AT HOME RESTRICTIONS IN JAMAICA



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions implemented worldwide have had a significant impact on the psychosocial and mental well-being of individuals and families. This impact has been particularly pronounced in terms of domestic violence, especially among young single women in Jamaica. **Objective:** This study aims to explore the mental health issues related to domestic violence among young single women during the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions in Jamaica in 2021. The research seeks to investigate whether there has been an increase in domestic violence incidents since the implementation of these restrictions, whether this increase has resulted in a rise in mental health problems among young single women, and why young single women are often targeted in such cases. **Methods:** The study will employ a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive insights into the topic. Firstly, a review of existing literature will be conducted to provide a research perspective on domestic violence-related mental health concerns among young single women during the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions. Secondly, data will be collected from victims and first responders to gain their perspectives on the issue. This combination of research and experiential data will contribute to a comprehensive analysis. **Results:** The findings from the literature review and the data collection will be presented, providing insights into the impact of the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions on domestic violence among young single women. The results will address the increase in domestic violence incidents, the correlation between this increase and mental health problems, as well as the factors that make young single women more susceptible to being targeted in such cases. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the subject matter of domestic violence-related mental health issues among young single women during the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions. The study highlights the significant impact of these restrictions on domestic violence, provides an understanding of the associated mental health problems, and explores the reasons behind the targeting of young single women. The research also examines the measures undertaken by the government and the criminal justice system to prevent the escalation of these issues. It is important to note that the presented information is based on factual and true knowledge, further enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Key words: COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions, Domestic violence, Young single women, Mental health, Jamaica.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first COVID-19 case in Jamaica was reported in March 2020, and since then, it has been an ongoing issue. This study focuses on victims of domestic violence, examining the factors that contribute to young single Jamaican women becoming victims of domestic violence. Additionally, the study aims to determine how the stay-at-home restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted the mental health of young single Jamaican women in relation to domestic violence.

A crime is an unlawful act or omission that constitutes an offense and is punishable by the state or other authorities. It is harmful not only to individuals but also to communities, society, or the state itself—a "public wrong." Criminal acts are prohibited and subject to legal consequences. Violent crimes are violations of criminal law where someone intentionally inflicts or threatens to inflict physical harm on another person and can also involve the use of weapons. Violence is defined as "behavior by individuals that intentionally threatens, attempts, or inflicts physical harm on others." The police categorize a crime as violent if the perpetrator clearly intended or aimed to physically harm someone, regardless of whether it resulted in actual physical injury. Violent crimes include rape, robbery, alcohol and drug-related violence, gang violence, domestic violence, hate crimes, assault, and murder.

Domestic violence refers to the behavior exhibited by an intimate partner or former partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm. This includes physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors (United Nations, n.d.; US National Library of Medicine, 2021). It encompasses various types of abuse, such as physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological, including stalking (US National Library of Medicine, 2021). According to Mentalhealth.gov (2022), mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences our thoughts, feelings, and actions and plays a role in how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Sociodemographic Factors:

The independent variables associated with domestic violence-related mental health issues among young single women due to COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions in Jamaica include greed, anger, jealousy, revenge, pride, history of exposure to violence, substance abuse, marital discord and dissatisfaction, difficulty communicating with partners, and male controlling behaviors. The dependent variables encompass women feeling frightened inside or outside their own homes,

the potential impact on children's mental health, potential avoidance of the area by new businesses, closure of existing businesses due to repeated domestic violence affecting their income, and loss of customers in the area. These variables can be mitigated through increased security presence in communities, family counseling sessions, readily available hotlines for women to seek help during the pandemic, and efforts to build trust between women and law enforcement for reporting abuse. Other strategies include establishing a Neighborhood Watch Scheme and implementing community-based policing. It is crucial to both punish offenders and provide rehabilitation programs to prevent reoffending.

Review of Literature:

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions can exacerbate the risk of violence against women due to stress, disrupted social networks, and reduced access to services. As people are encouraged to stay at home and practice physical distancing, the likelihood of intimate partner violence increases. Furthermore, access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, including support for women experiencing violence, may become more limited. Hotlines, crisis centers, shelters, legal aid, and protection services may also face reductions in their capacity, further impeding access to sources of help for women in abusive relationships.

In a research article by Bourne et al. (2021), it was highlighted that Jamaica lacks safe havens for women who are victims of violence. Various sources, such as Jamaicans for Justice and a survey conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank, indicate high levels of domestic violence in Jamaica, with significant increases reported during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disturbing incidents of domestic abuse against women have been widely covered in news reports, illustrating the severity of the issue. The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) has made efforts to address this problem by reaffirming its commitment to combat domestic violence through education, empowering citizens to report incidents, and expanding domestic violence intervention (DVI) centers. However, the mounting statistics and alarming local trends of domestic violence among Jamaican women necessitate further exploration of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this issue.

Research has been conducted to examine the impact of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on violence against women. The National Library of Medicine (2020) conducted research that revealed an alarming increase in reports of intimate partner violence during stay-at-home restrictions, with some cases involving partners using physical distancing measures to isolate affected women from resources. Police divisions reported a tripled number of domestic violence cases in February 2020 compared to the previous year, with an estimated 90% of them related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These are just a few examples of the media stories and reports that have highlighted the issue.

The article also emphasizes the importance of mental health interventions tailored to domestic violence victims. Research has shown that such interventions can mitigate the adverse effects caused by mental health issues and promote the overall well-being of domestic violence victims. However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a concerning lack of mental health interventions specifically designed for domestic violence victims, especially in Jamaica. While some European countries have implemented procedures and resources to assist these victims, Jamaica has yet to fully adapt to online counseling and support services (BioMed Central, 2021).

Ali, P., Rogers, M., and Heward-Belle, S. (2020) highlight the increased rates of domestic violence abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. They attribute this surge to the restrictions on movement and social distancing measures, as well as the economic and social stressors resulting from the pandemic. The article emphasizes that the restriction of movement and social distancing measures have had a significant impact on the mental health of domestic violence victims, making it more challenging for them to cope. While other European countries have implemented online counseling and support measures, the health sector in Jamaica has not yet fully embraced these resources (Ali et al., 2020).

Paris21.org (2021) reports a significant increase in domestic violence cases in Jamaica since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Shockingly, one in every four Jamaican women has experienced physical abuse by their male counterparts, and 25% have been victims of sexual abuse by men who are not their intimate partners. This research aims to explore ways to amend laws, legislations, and acts in Jamaica to reduce or prevent domestic violence against women during the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions.

Another study evaluated the impact of COVID-19-related lockdowns on the mental health and gender-based violence of Tunisian women. The findings showed a considerable increase in violence against women during the lockdown, with psychological abuse being the most common form. Women who had previously experienced abuse were more likely to face violence during the lockdown. These factors contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic becoming not only a physical health risk but also a psychosocial crisis and a violation of human rights. The study utilized a confidential online survey to gather data on sociodemographics, mental health, lockdown experiences, and COVID-19 risk status (Paris21.org, 2021).

In summary, these research studies highlight the concerning increase in violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic and the detrimental effects on their mental health. The lack of tailored mental health interventions, the need for legal amendments, and the urgency to address this issue at a societal level are crucial aspects of addressing and preventing domestic violence during these challenging times.

It has been observed that violence against women increased from 4.4% to 14.8% during the lockdown period. Psychological violence emerged as the most prevalent form, with nearly all victims (96%) experiencing emotional abuse, followed by economic (41%) and physical (10%) violence. Surprisingly, almost 90% of individuals subjected to violence during the lockdown did not seek help, and no female victims of emotional abuse came forward to report it. Those who had previously experienced domestic abuse were more likely to experience violence during the lockdown (73% compared to 12% among those without prior abuse) (Sediri et al., 2020).

According to Sánchez et al. (2020), after the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, governments worldwide implemented stringent social distancing measures to curb the spread of the virus. These measures have had an impact on family dynamics, including family income, interpersonal relationships, well-being, and mental health. Violence against women has been labeled a "global scourge" by the United Nations General Secretary. The coexistence of the COVID-19 and domestic violence pandemics heightens the risks of adverse effects on the health and well-being of those who were already in precarious circumstances before the pandemic. The impact of violence extends beyond women to other family members, such as children, adolescents, and the elderly, emphasizing the need for an intergenerational approach. Social distancing policies have been implemented worldwide, leading to an increase in violence, even in countries beyond low and middle-income nations. Despite possible underreporting, there has been evidence of increased contacts with survivor support agencies and helpline calls. Various factors can influence reporting, help-seeking behavior, and accessibility to assistance. Stay-at-home restrictions have resulted in women feeling mentally uncomfortable in their own homes due to intimate partner domestic abuse.

The prevalence of domestic violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic has become a serious public health concern. Multiple studies have shown a significant increase in domestic abuse during this period. Domestic violence is an enduring issue, but the pandemic and associated lockdown measures have exacerbated the situation. Risk factors for domestic violence include being a housewife, being under 30 years old, having a husband between the ages of 31 and 40, as well as experiencing physical and sexual assault. Depression, increased proximity, job losses, financial uncertainty, lockdowns, substance addiction, control over family finances, technological abuse, and isolation are additional risk factors. This pandemic has shed light on the distressing rise of gender-based violence globally. Violence against women has profound consequences on their health, including physical injuries, pregnancy complications, and psychological disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is a multifaceted problem that impacts various aspects of society, including health, morality, law, education, economy, and human rights. Women's active involvement in planning, policymaking, and effective implementation is crucial during this crisis to address the intersection of COVID-19 and domestic violence while considering the challenging circumstances it has generated (Wake & Kandula, 2022).

Research questions:

1. What are the causes of Covid-19 stay at home restrictions on domestic violence related mental health issues among young women in Jamaica 2021?
2. How many young women in Jamaica have been affected by domestic violence's related mental health issues during the Covid-19 stay at home restrictions 2021?
3. How has domestic violence during Covid-19 stay at home restriction affected young women's mental health in Jamaica 2021?
4. What are the aged groups of men committing domestic violence in Jamaica 2021?
5. Is the criminal justice system doing anything or enough to protect young single women who are victims of domestic violence related mental health in Jamaica 2021?
6. Does domestic violence related mental health issues increase due to the covid-19 stay at home restrictions Jamaica 2021?

Aims and objectives of research

Some objectives that will be carried out in this study of domestic violence related mental health issues among young single women due to covid-19 stay at home restrictions in Jamaica 2021 are:

1. To define domestic violence, and mental health.
2. Give examples of domestic violence and mental health issues.
3. To find out if mental health issues among young single women is caused by domestic violence during the covid-19 stay at home restrictions.
4. Find out what is the government doing to prevent domestic violence related mental health issues among young single women during the covid-19 stay at home restrictions.
5. Explain why domestic violence related mental health issues are more prevalent in young single women during the covid-19 stay at home restrictions.
6. Explain why domestic violence related mental health issues increased due to covid-19 stay at home restrictions.

By addressing these objectives, the research aims to enhance understanding of the complex relationship between domestic violence, mental health, and the Covid-19 stay-at-home restrictions in Jamaica in 2021.

2. MATERIELS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

In the research design phase, the objectives of the study were established, along with the determination of the data to be collected and the selection of suitable data collection methods. The quantitative research method was chosen due to the need for statistical analysis, graphs, tables, and numerical data presentation. Questionnaires were identified as the primary data collection tool for both victims of domestic violence and first responders. The logistics and resources required for the research, including financial, time, and human power, were also considered.

2.2 Sample

The proposed sample size for the research was 20 individuals, but ultimately, only 14 respondents completed the questionnaires. The criteria for sample selection involved targeting 15 victims of domestic violence to obtain firsthand data relevant to the study, and 5 first responders were included to gather raw data from individuals who deal with such cases on a daily basis.

2.3 Research Tools

The research employed questionnaires as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions to ensure comprehensive data retrieval for the research.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

The selected data collection method was the administration of questionnaires. This method was chosen for its ability to collect information, opinions, and demographic data efficiently. It saved time and financial resources by utilizing online platforms such as Google Forms to create and distribute the questionnaire via email and WhatsApp messages. Additionally, it minimized the need for extensive travel or printing costs. The data collection was conducted in two specific parishes in Jamaica, namely St Catherine and St Ann's. These parishes were selected due to the research team's familiarity with the areas and their access to suitable participants.

3. RESULTS

The questionnaire was completed by a total of fourteen (14) female respondents. Among them, seven were aged between 18-25, and the other seven were aged between 26-45. In terms of relationship status, nine were single, three were in a common law union, and two were married. When asked about their comfort level in their community, seven females reported feeling comfortable, three said they did not feel comfortable, and the remaining four were unsure. The reasons provided for their answers varied. Some mentioned factors such as bushes between houses, houses being spaced out, open yards without walls or gates, the presence of both good and bad people in the community, and the unpredictable nature of safety due to both law-abiding citizens and occasional police and criminal activities. One respondent indicated that violence is pervasive and nobody seems to be safe, while another believed that there is no violence in her community. Some respondents expressed that they have no issues in their community, considering it nonviolent and quiet. Feeling safe at home and being familiar with the surroundings were also cited as reasons for feeling secure. However, one respondent mentioned not being from the community, and another expressed a lack of personal security. Out of the respondents, nine identified themselves as victims of domestic violence, while the remaining five were first responders. Among the victims, five experienced emotional abuse, three experienced physical abuse, three experienced psychological abuse, and one experienced sexual abuse. Jealousy was identified as the main reason for domestic violence by six respondents, while three attributed it to unemployment, three to family disorientation, and two to mental illness. Five individuals stated that their community has always been plagued by domestic violence, while nine disagreed, stating that it has not always been the case. Regarding the connection between domestic violence and mental health issues in young single women, six respondents believed that domestic violence is not the cause, while eight believed that it is.

Some reasons given were

Women today often perceive domestic violence as a normal occurrence in relationships, leading them to wait until it's too late to leave or try to work things out. Therefore, domestic violence is not seen as the direct cause of mental health issues in young single women. However, the effects of abuse can have long-lasting negative consequences, especially if not addressed. Domestic violence affects women psychologically, sometimes leading to deep depression. Many women who experience abuse remain silent out of fear, which further weighs them down. It's important to recognize that domestic violence is not solely physical, as even verbal abuse can have a significant impact on someone's mental well-being. Tragically, the country witnesses the murder of a woman by someone she knows, often an intimate partner or ex-partner, on a weekly basis. The impact of Covid-19 stay-at-home restrictions has caused a surge in domestic violence cases, according to seven respondents, while six believed it increased to some extent, and one person disagreed. Reasons for the increase included frustration and irrational behavior due to unemployment and financial constraints, boredom leading to confusion and overthinking, frequent conflicts arising from spending more time with partners, mental health deterioration due to unemployment and lockdown, highlighting hidden traits due to constant proximity,

lack of work leading to the creation of problems, increased exposure to abusers with limited escape options, lack of work experience, refusal to work, and heightened frustration. In terms of community involvement in preventing the increase of domestic violence, seven individuals felt that community members were not fulfilling their role, five were unsure, and two believed they were. Concerns about the recent surge in violence against women were expressed by ten respondents, while four respondents expressed feelings of sadness. Regarding the disciplinary action for offenders, ten individuals did not view detainment as the best approach, three were uncertain, and one person agreed. Regarding the effectiveness of the Jamaican Criminal Justice System, nine respondents stated that it has not been helpful in their community, while five respondents believed it has been. Reasons given for the lack of support included the inadequate provision of guidance and counseling for couples, particularly for women who are victims of domestic violence. The confidence in security forces among citizens is often low, leading to hesitancy in reporting these acts. Domestic violence against women is not a top priority for law enforcement, and there is a perceived lack of skills and intelligence in handling such cases effectively. Insufficient measures are being taken to protect and ensure the safety of women and girls who are victims of domestic violence, and more needs to be done in terms of stricter measures and harsher punishments. Hotlines for women's help are rarely answered, and insufficient resources and attention are allocated to the issue until it escalates to a fatal outcome. The current state of the Jamaican Criminal Justice System is deemed poor, and there is a call for greater protection for women, emphasizing the need for improvement and stronger actions.

Table 1: Table showing results for responders sex and age.

Sex	Response	Age	Total
Female	100%	18-25	50%
		26-45	50%

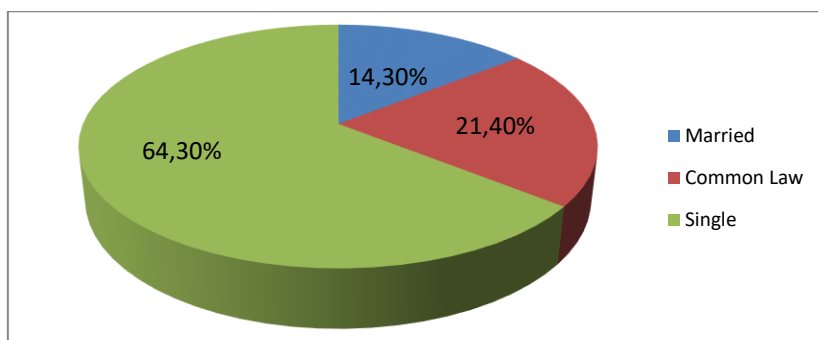


Figure 2: Pie Chart showing results for responders' relationship status.

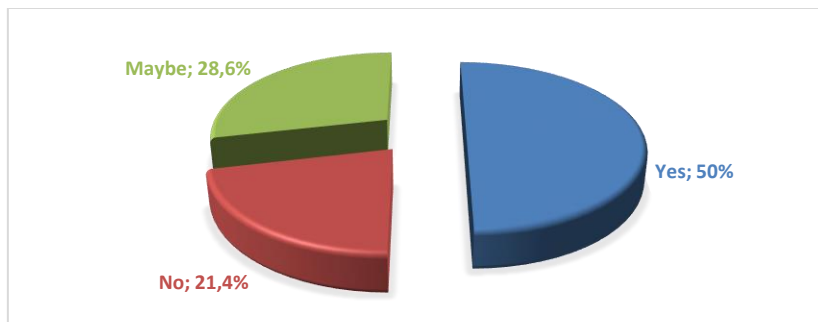


Figure 3: Pie Chart showing results for the question, do you feel comfortable in your community.

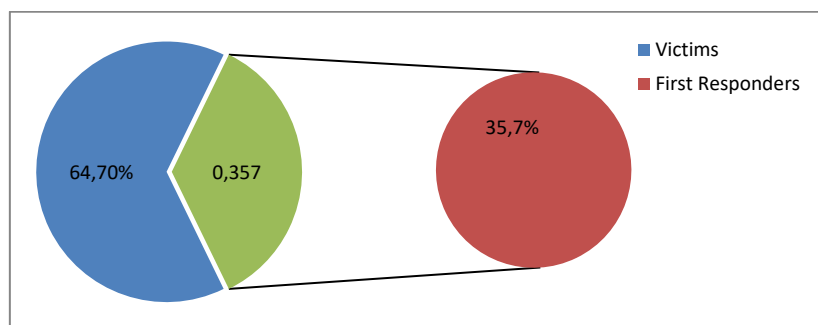


Figure 4: Pie Chart showing results for the question are you a victim or first responder to domestic violence.

Table 5: Table showing results for the question what type of domestic violence you have been a victim or first responder to.

Type of Domestic Violence	No. of Responses
Physical	21.4%
Sexual	7.2%
Emotional	35.7%
Psychological	21.4%
None	14.3%
Total Percentage Responses	100%

Table 6: Table showing results for the question why people commit domestic violence.

Causes of Domestic Violence	No. of Responses
Unemployment	21.4%
Sexual Dissatisfaction	0%
Family Disorientation	21.4%
Jealousy	42.9%
Mental Illnesses	14.3%
Total Percentage Responses	100%

Table 7: Table showing results for the questions listed within the table.

Series	Question	Responses
Series 1.	Has the community always been plagued with domestic violence?	No- 64.3% Yes- 35.7%
Series 2.	Do you think domestic violence is the cause of mental health related issues in young single women in the community?	Yes- 57.1% No- 42.9%
Series 3.	Is Covid-19 stay at home restrictions the cause of the rampant increase in domestic violence?	Yes- 50% No- 7.1% Somewhat- 42.9%

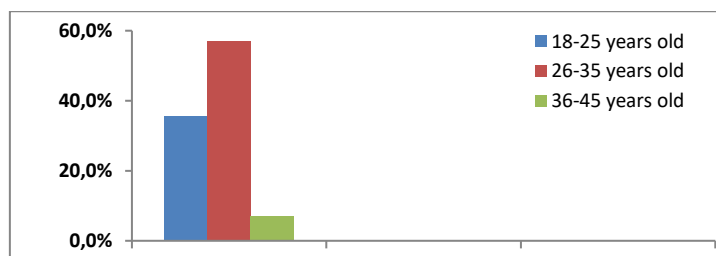


Table 8: Bar graph showing results for the question what age groups do you believe are behind these violent crimes.

Table 9: Table showing results for the question listed in the table above.

Series	Questions	Responses
Series 1.	Are community members playing their roles in preventing domestic violence increase? For example (reporting domestic violence)	Yes- 14.3% No- 50% Maybe- 35.7%
Series 2.	How do you feel about the recent strings of violence against women?	Bad- 28.6% Concerned- 71.4%
Series 3.	Do you think that detainment is, in every case, the best disciplinary action for offenders?	Yes- 7.1% No- 71.4% Maybe- 21.4%
Series 4.	Has the Jamaican Criminal Justice System been of any help in your community?	Yes- 35.7% No- 64.3%
Series 5.	If any of these recommendations should come into effect, do you think it will benefit the community and reduce domestic violence against women?	Yes- 71.4% No- 0% Maybe- 28.6%

Table 10: Table showing results for the question what recommendations would you suggest to the government to make your community safer for women.

Recommendations	No. of Responses
Focus more on rehabilitating offenders.	0%
Use social media to help identify criminals.	14.3%
Promoting community meetings and workshops for domestic violence prevention	78.6%
Using restorative justice.	7.1%
Total % responses	100%

4. Discussion

According to studies, it has been found that domestic violence affects more than 30% of women in Jamaica at some point in their lives. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, there has been a surge in violent crimes against women in Jamaica, including horrific acts of violence and even murder. The implementation of Covid-19 measures, such as stay-at-home orders, has also contributed to an increase in domestic violence incidents. These findings provide valuable insights into the age range of affected females, their mental state, and their sense of safety within the community, enabling us to address the prevalent types of abuse and develop appropriate strategies for intervention. Most respondents do not believe that detainment alone can change the behavior of offenders, emphasizing the need for the Criminal Justice System to evaluate its approaches to encourage perpetrators to transform their abusive ways, thereby fostering a safer environment for females. However, it is evident that the Justice System is failing to provide adequate support to the women who need it the most, and there is a consensus that more can and should be done. It is disheartening to learn that the Women's Help Hotline is often unreachable, as this creates a perception that nobody cares, leaving victims with limited options and potentially trapped in abusive situations. By understanding the age group of offenders, proactive interventions can be implemented with young males before their behavior escalates into abuse. Additionally, with insights into the underlying causes of mental health issues, appropriate treatments can be provided. Ultimately, this study successfully establishes a link between mental health issues and domestic violence in young single women.

This research employed a questionnaire-based approach to investigate the relationship between domestic violence-related mental health issues and young single women in Jamaica during the Covid-19 stay-at-home restrictions implemented in 2021. A total of 20 questionnaires were distributed, with 15 sent to victims and 5 to first responders. A response rate of 70% was achieved, indicating a satisfactory level of participation. However, it is important to note that a limitation of this study was the non-return or incomplete completion of 40% of the distributed questionnaires. This could be attributed to the sensitive nature of the topic, as some women who have experienced domestic violence may be hesitant to openly discuss or acknowledge their victimization. Another limitation of the study was the scarcity of available articles and research on this specific topic due to the relatively recent emergence of the Covid-19 crisis. The time constraints imposed on the research process also posed a limitation, as it hindered the ability to conduct a more in-depth exploration of the subject matter.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study on domestic violence-related mental health issues among young single women during the Covid-19 stay-at-home restrictions in Jamaica in 2021 is a critical and sensitive topic, as supported by the evidence presented in the various research articles. These studies have shed light on different aspects of domestic violence and its impact on the mental health of young single women, drawing comparisons with other countries such as the United States and European nations. The information provided has significantly contributed to the overall understanding of the subject matter and will serve as valuable content for further discussions. Furthermore, the evidence gathered through our research method, which involved the use of questionnaires, reinforces the link between domestic violence-related mental health issues and the Covid-19 stay-at-home restrictions among young single women.

Recommendations: The government could use social media to help identify offenders (14.3%), promote community meetings and workshops for domestic violence prevention (78.6%), and use restorative justice (7.1%), to name a few suggestions made to the responder about how the government could make their neighborhood safer. The Domestic Violence Offenders List also offered some further suggestions that can help the community become a safer place for women.

- An outreach program designed for the younger generation of boys and men to educate them on how to handle relationship issues when they arise.
- They had the belief that when reports are made, the top head should take the matter seriously as quickly as feasible.
- Eye for an eye is their guiding principle. If a guy kills a lady, the government ought to have him executed as soon as he is apprehended.
- Patrol cars from dispatch visit communities at various intervals. Increase the reporting of violence against women.
- Build strong relationships with locals so they'll want to ask for assistance and be more able to trust people who are there to serve, reassure, and protect them. Increasing the number of lectures on identifying and stopping violence against women.
- Visit every inner-city neighborhood and speak with the women there, as they are the ones that are abused the most.

When the respondent was asked if any of the given recommendations should be implemented, did they believe that doing so would benefit the community and lessen domestic violence against women, the majority of women responded "yes" (a total of 71.4%), while 28.6% stated "maybe."

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