

## Understanding and Preventing Gender-based Violence in the Anglophone Caribbean: A Multi-disciplinary Endeavor

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### Abstract:

The edited volume *Critical Caribbean Perspectives on Preventing Gender-Based Violence* insightfully explores the complex topic of GBV in the Caribbean. Its multi-disciplinary contributions emphasize the need to approach GBV multidimensionally to do justice to the complex and intricate nature of the topic. In particular, the volume facilitates a discussion about aspects of GBV that have not gained a lot of attention, and are mostly invisible or even silenced in public discourse.

### Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt Verstehen und Verhindern: Ein multidisziplinäres Unterfangen

#### German Abstract:

Der Sammelband *Critical Caribbean Perspectives on Preventing Gender-Based Violence* erforscht aufschlussreich das komplexe Thema der geschlechtsspezifischen Gewalt in der Karibik. Seine multidisziplinären Beiträge betonen die Notwendigkeit, GBV mehrdimensional zu betrachten, um der komplexen und komplizierten Natur des Themas gerecht zu werden. Insbesondere ermöglicht der Band eine Diskussion über Aspekte von GBV, die bisher wenig Beachtung gefunden haben und im öffentlichen Diskurs meist unsichtbar oder unbeachtet sind.

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## Understanding and Preventing Gender-based Violence in the Anglophone Caribbean: A Multi-disciplinary Endeavor

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#LifeInLeggings, #SayTheirNames, #LeveDomnik — With the use of these hashtags, Caribbean feminist activists raised awareness for the fact that gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most common forms of violence in the region. In the Caribbean, the first hashtag campaign to tackle GBV was created in 2016 and gained traction after #MeToo went viral in the USA in 2017. Due to the efforts of these activists — who collected stories of sexual abuse and harassment on social media platforms, organized street marches to protest, went to schools and universities to educate young people, and lobbied for policy changes — the awareness for the pervasiveness of the problem has been increased and GBV features prominently in academic discussion and research. GBV is a complex topic that manifests in multiple forms and facets as it encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as economic violence and trafficking, and affects women, men, and children across the region. The cultural and social implications of gender-based violence are far-reaching and can have devastating effects on individuals, families, and communities. The edited volume at hand sets out to unravel the complexities of GBV and to explore its multifaceted dimensions (cf. p. 1).

As the title — *Critical Caribbean Perspectives on Preventing Gender-Based Violence* — suggests, and as Ramona Biholar states in the introduction, the aim of the edited volume is twofold: First, it aims at “understanding the in-between spaces of GBV, its perpetration and prevention, and the supportive gender norms and power structures” (p. 2). Second, it wants to “propose viable solutions to prevent GBV in the region” (p. 2). Editors Ramona Biholar and Dacia L. Leslie take to the task by compiling ten chapters that each examine GBV from within a different disciplinary perspective to explore “how violence victimisation and perpetration have been historically, socially, and institutionally shaped” (p. 2). In the introduction to the volume, Biholar emphasizes the necessity of approaching GBV multi- and cross-disciplinary as well as with a variety of

research methods to do justice to the complex and intricate nature of the topic. The volume is especially interested in facilitating a discussion about aspects of GBV that have not gained a lot of attention, and are mostly invisible or even silenced in public discourse, such as interpersonal violence (IPV) in LGBTQ+ relationships and violence experienced by persons with disabilities.

The chapters of the volume can be grouped into the broader categories of history, law, policy and practice (cf. p. 2). While some chapters engage with much discussed topics such as tracing the historical roots of GBV to colonialism and slavery (chapter 1) and the limited effect of sexual violence laws due to narrow definitions of rape and normalization of marital rape (chapter 3) — which make these chapters a great foundation for readers not yet familiar with the topics as they provide a comprehensive overview and contextualization, as well as point to other research and discussions — other chapters address less frequently discussed topics and focus on marginalized experiences with GBV. Most noteworthy in this regard are chapters 7, 9 and 10. In chapter 7, Anna Kasafi Perkins takes a first step to tackle the gap in knowledge of IPV among LGBTQ+ women by discussing the issue in a key informant interview with a Jamaican LGBTQ+ advocate and activist and contextualizing this “first-hand knowledge” (p. 125) with existing research on violence against women and girls in Jamaica. Perkins is particularly interested in exploring the role of the church as a resource for support for all women experiencing IPV. As the church still figures as an important and influential institution in Jamaican society, she argues that the church should make use of its institutional power and influence “to unearth resources from within the Christian tradition to combat IPV among LGBTQ+ women” and to offer support to everyone affected by IPV (p. 143). Similarly, in chapter 9, Godfrey St. Barnard, Shivana Chankar, and Safia King outline possible institutional resources to decrease violence. But unlike Perkins, St. Barnard et al. do not focus on support for victims but investigate the effectiveness of primary prevention measures targeted at so-called ‘at risk’ boys and young men in Trinidad and Tobago. Through a case study approach, they examine two state-led programs and one civil society organization and point out the benefits and positive effects these programmes have on boys living in marginalized communities. Accordingly, such forms of social intervention are effective measures of preventing violence as they provide “fresh and alternative perspectives for interpreting masculinity in accordance with different lenses that embrace progressive ideals for young boys, their communities, and the nation” (p. 183). In chapter 10, Floyd Morris puts persons with disabilities (PWD) and their experience with violence

center stage — a marginalized group that is more often than not still marginal in discussions on GBV. Morris focuses on investigating the inclusiveness of access to the Jamaican justice services. For that, he collected primary data from three focus groups that were comprised of participants with different disabilities such as being blind, deaf, or with intellectual or physical disabilities (cf. p. 189) and in a group discussion reflected on their violence or discrimination experiences as well as on difficulties when accessing the justice system. Just like Perkins in her analysis of IPV among LGBTQ+ women, Morris calls for the need for further research and collection of data as a first step to decrease violence against PWD. Based on the results of his research, he further offers a variety of recommendations the state should take to make its justice system more inclusive such as training employees of the justice system to be able to engage with PWD and provide effective means of communication for PWD in the form of Sign Language or easy to understand language (cf. p. 201).

All in all, *Critical Caribbean Perspectives on Preventing Gender-based Violence* truly holds up to what its title promises as it compiles multiple perspectives on GBV by Caribbean scholars engaging with different aspects of GBV in countries of the anglophone Caribbean as well as delineating a variety of possible routes to prevent GBV. The volume is well-grounded in theory, but its focus definitely lies on providing practical approaches to dealing with and preventing GBV which is strongly reflected in the research methods of the ten chapters as they all use primary qualitative data in order to, as Dacia L. Leslie points out in the conclusion, “harness the voice, experiences, and wisdom of persons who live and work closest to the issue of GBV” (p. 207). That the volume gathers so many different voices of different persons is what makes it most engaging and stand out amidst the many other publications on the topic. With the variety of topics it addresses in connection to GBV, such as its historical roots (chapter 1), the connection between labor and violence (chapter 2), or how the media can shape the discourse on sexual violence (chapter 6), it offers an entry point to current research on the topic and provides the reader with a myriad of references to dive deeper into the issue. Typical for the legal and policy context, abbreviations roam freely and frequently in the text – thus, the list of abbreviations placed at the beginning of the volume is much appreciated guidance for the reader in this abbreviations jungle. Due to its interdisciplinarity, its accessible and informative nature but also due to its complex discussion of marginal aspects of gendered violence in the Caribbean, *Critical Caribbean Perspectives on Preventing Gender-based Violence* will appeal to

students and scholars alike and will be of interest to everyone engaging with gender studies, law, history, criminology or social work.