BEST PRACTICE SYMPOSIUM FOR SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Inter-Ministerial PR Communications Brief

Family Structures in Jamaica

and government support for parenting

Prepared for briefing of Ministry PR Directors

Eleventh Best Practice Symposium for Social and Community Development

Source: Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC) 2023

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Purpose

This brief guides Ministry PR Directors in compiling a list of policies and programmes that support good parenting across Jamaica. It summarises key findings from the JSLC 2023 on family structure, parental challenges, and government's current support framework.

Household Structure and Parental Roles

Household Type	With Children	Detail
Female-headed	41.9%	36.7% without a spouse; 5.2% with a spouse
Male-headed	20.8%	18.2% with a spouse; 2.6% without a spouse

- Female-headed households are more likely to include children and less likely to include an adult male.
- Male-headed households are more likely to have a spouse present and less likely to have children.

Household Size and Children

Note: "Mean" refers to the statistical average — the total number of persons (or children) across all households in a group, divided by the number of households in that group. Households are also grouped into "quintiles," which divide the population into five equal-sized groups ranked by income or consumption, from poorest (Quintile 1) to wealthiest (Quintile 5). The "poorest quintile" refers to the lowest-income fifth of the population.

- Average household size has declined, driven mainly by fewer children per household — a mean of 0.5 children per household in 2023, down from 0.8 in 2017.
- Female-headed households have a larger mean household size (2.9 persons) and more children on average (0.7) than male-headed households (2.3 persons; 0.4 children).
- Households in the poorest quintile (Quintile 1 — the lowest-income fifth of the population) have the largest average household size (3.7 persons) and the most children on average (1.1) of any quintile, and are more likely to be female-headed.
- In the poorest quintile, 50.0% of female-headed households had children present but no spouse.

Education and Parental Involvement

- **80.7%** of students attended school all 20 days in the reference period.
- Main reasons for non-attendance: illness (49.5%), rain (18.9%), and money problems (14.8%).
- Financial challenges affecting school attendance are more pronounced in poorer households, often headed by single parents.

- Participation in school feeding programmes is higher among students in the poorest quintiles, reflecting targeted support for vulnerable families.
- Early childhood education enrolment is high (over **93%** for children aged 36–59 months), indicating strong parental engagement, though the survey notes a slight decline in participation, suggesting potential access challenges for families.

Community Violence and Family Wellbeing

- An estimated **4.1%** of individuals reported an episode of illness or injury (including violence-related) during the four-week reference period.
- 61.8% of those affected sought health care; females were more likely to seek care (66.3%) than males (56.9%). Average duration of illness/injury was 8.2 days, with 4.4 days of impairment.
- Illness/injury rates were broadly similar across regions (4.3% GKMA, 3.6% other urban centres, 4.3% rural), though the poorest quintile reported a lower incidence rate (3.3%) alongside a much higher rate of seeking care (92.1%).
- Community violence disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including women, children, and poorer households, who face greater barriers to care and greater economic consequences.
- National homicide rates rose from 44.3 per 100,000 in 2015 to a peak of 60.5 in 2017, before declining to **41.9 in 2024**. Men are disproportionately affected (peak of 110.3 per 100,000, declining to 78.8 in 2024) compared to women (5.9 per 100,000 in 2024).
- Firearms remain the primary weapon used in homicides, averaging 41.6 per 100,000 population annually from 2015–2024.
- Most homicides are committed by individuals other than intimate partners or family members, underscoring that this is largely community-based rather than domestic violence.

SUMMARY

Female-headed households with children are the most vulnerable, requiring targeted support through social protection, education, and health programmes. The findings also highlight the Government's integrated approach — linking poverty reduction, education access, health care, and violence prevention — to strengthen family structures and parenting across Jamaica.

Major Policies, Programmes and Legislation Supporting Parenting

For use in compiling Ministry-specific communications on parenting support.

Social Protection and Poverty Reduction

- **Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH):** Conditional cash transfer targeting families with children, elderly, and vulnerable groups. 27.9% of households applied; 59.2% received benefits, highest among poorest and female-headed households.
- **National Poverty Reduction Programme & Jamaica Social Protection Strategy:** Address basic needs, economic empowerment, and human capital development.
- **Early childhood enrolment:** over 93% for children aged 36–59 months.

Household Well-being and Infrastructure

- Access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity measured to assess family living conditions.
- Programmes aim to strengthen resilience against economic shocks and natural disasters.

Community Violence Reduction

- Government collaborates with communities to reduce violence and insecurity.
- Firearm seizures and homicide monitoring reflect ongoing national security efforts.
- Safe recreational spaces
- Accessible legal aid and restorative justice pathways
- Democratic and resilient community governance structures

Education Support

- **Tuition-free or supported education**: Increases access to education and employment for individuals from poor households, directly benefiting families.
- **School Feeding Programmes and Textbook Programmes:** Provide meals and textbooks to support children, particularly from low-income households, reducing the financial burden on parents, especially single mothers and low-income families. Participation is highest among students in the poorest quintiles.

Child and Maternal Health

- Government tracking and support systems address child stunting and malnutrition among children under five, reflecting attention to family nutrition and parental care.
- High early childhood education enrolment reflects government-supported organised learning access before primary school.

• Suggested Core Public Services Supporting Parenting

Parent Ministry	Core Public Services
Office of the Prime Minister / Cabinet	• New Social Housing Programme
Economic Growth & Infrastructure Development	• Housing assistance, urban renewal, and housing development programmes • Public beach licensing and management (70 sites islandwide)
National Security and Peace	• Liv Good national citizen security and behaviour-change initiative • JCF Community Safety and Citizen Security branches • Department of Correctional Services (Community Corrections, probation, juvenile rehabilitation) • Jamaica Combined Cadet Force (JCCF) • Firearm Licensing Authority (FLA) safety frameworks
Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining	• RADA School Gardens programme • Jamaica 4-H Clubs • Parks and Public Gardens management (3 botanical gardens; lessor of Royal Botanical Gardens at Hope) • Recreational boating safety
Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport	• JCDC cultural development programmes for cultural transfer • Sports Development Foundation (SDF) fixtures and venues • State-supported Women's Shelters • Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation (WCJF) • Cinematograph Authority • National Library of Jamaica and National museum • Support for national sports federations and educational institutional sporting activities
Education, Skills, Youth and Information	• Institutional education services, Youth Information Centres, and advisory boards • Public information platforms (Libraries, PBCJ, CPTC, JIS, Access to Information) • National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC) • Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) • Public scholarships and educational grants
Energy, Transport and Telecommunications	• Public transport licensing and dedicated school bus services • Community and school-based ICT digital access points

Finance and the Public Service	• Dedicated scholarships for children of public sector employees • Student Loans Bureau (SLB) • PIOJ National Poverty Reduction Programme coordination
Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade	• Consular support services • Strategic Diaspora engagement programmes
Health and Wellness	• Institutional healthcare delivery and parent-in-hospital facilitation policies • Jamaica Moves healthy lifestyle behaviour-change programming
Industry, Investment and Commerce	• MSME business development services • Consumer protection rights and services
Justice and Constitutional Affairs	• Restorative Justice community programmes • Legal Aid clinics • Juvenile Diversion Programme • Victim Support Programmes
Labour and Social Security	• Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) • Farm Worker Programme (including structured family visit provisions) • National Insurance Scheme (NIS)
Local Government & Community Development	• Municipal poor relief services and parish infirmary support • Local Social Development Commission (SDC) initiatives • Municipal licensing of events and venues • Municipal community centres
Tourism	• Community tourism and artisan development programmes • Tourism Worker Insurance frameworks • Milk River and Bath Fountain mineral spas • Devon House
Water, Environment & Climate Change	• National water supply grid services • Public access to natural recreational forests and protected marine parks • Rural Water Supply