

# Nurturing children

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*This extract is from a tracer study of the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) in Trinidad. The study looked at the lives of 79 Trinidadians in their 20s around 10 years after half of them had participated in the ADP, and looked particularly at the effects of the programme on parenting, nurturing and childrearing in general.*

The ADP grew out of the early experiences of Servol (Service Volunteered for All) in the 1970s when it ran courses to impart skills to adolescents and prepare them for the world of work. Although skills were acquired, the young people had difficulty in holding down jobs because of their own attitudes to life and work which were a consequence of their early life experiences.

Since the early 1980s, young people applying to Servol are required to participate in the ADP before undertaking a skills training course. During the three-month course the 16 to 19 year olds are helped to better understand themselves; to better handle their emotions and everyday problems; to become more enlightened, better equipped and more responsible parents; and to become motivated to equip

themselves academically and/or with marketable skills. The ADP is available in some 20 centres throughout the country and modified versions have been introduced to some secondary schools and other institutions.

Among the study respondents, a principal area of concern was the nurturing of their children. In general, respondents were in contact with their children and made efforts to provide the kind of support that would enhance their children's well-being.

This was evident among all respondents, whether they were former Servol trainees or in the comparison group. This was also observed irrespective of gender and the community setting. In most cases, respondents said that they lived with their children. In the few exceptional

cases where they did not share the same residence, there still appeared to be genuine concern for the welfare of the children and attempts were made to maintain contact and provide support.

Whether from the group of former trainees or the comparison group, respondents revealed that they had devoted a considerable amount of time to their children, particularly during infancy. This was especially the case for the female respondents. Moreover, both groups of respondents recognised that they had to make sacrifices, particularly with respect to their leisure time activities outside of the home. Both groups reported that they had had problems with the health of their infants. Respondents also talked of the financial challenges that were more likely to occur as their children grew older.

In order to overcome challenges, financial ones in particular, reference was made to a number of strategies that included looking for work, relying upon divine help, and becoming self-sufficient and resourceful. The latter was the strategy adopted by some male respondents who were former Servol trainees and who sought to become entrepreneurs in order to overcome financial difficulties that threatened their livelihood and that of their offspring.

Overall, there was a clear recognition that parenting was an arduous task that required parents to demonstrate a great deal of responsibility in nurturing their children. Nonetheless, there was general agreement that parenting was a pleasant experience that had to be embraced and pursued diligently. Mention was made of close interactions between



Apprentices and children in the carpentry workshop, Photo: Servol

respondents and their children, and reciprocal processes of interactions through such activities as singing, playing, touching and cuddling.

Among the respondents, there was general consensus that the ADP had at

least reinforced the virtues associated with the task of parenting. In several cases, they felt that the ADP enhanced their parenting skills. For instance, they did things such as getting their children more involved in recreational activities. They also found that the exposure to

the ADP enabled them to be more patient and attentive to the children and, as a consequence, enhanced their parent-child relationships. One respondent noted that the ADP

*...made me more aware of particular areas of my life. It reinforced for me that a person has the power to instil knowledge in another individual's life. I consider parenting to be a privilege and an honour.*

The programme disseminated information that was relevant and was of assistance in taking care of children. In general, the ADP made a difference in parenting skills and provided a basis for ensuring that trainees were well prepared for their responsibilities as parents.

One male respondent acknowledged that the parenting course had a significant impact on him:

*If the ADP was not there, I do not know how I would be looking at life today. ADP taught me self-awareness. What you are for, what you are not. I teach what I learn from ADP. Every youth in Junior Secondary School should be exposed to this programme. Most people who pass through ADP are different up to today.*

Another said,

*The parenting course made me have respect for my parents and realise that it is not easy to bring up children. Even when I have arguments with my parents, I remember that they made me and that I must have respect for them.*

One female respondent said that because she had her son when she attended the ADP, 'the parenting course was relevant and helped me to better understand him'. It should be noted that some former trainees indicated that they did not appreciate the full impact of the parenting course when it was being taught. This was because some of them were not sexually active or were not thinking about forming relationships. A male respondent expressed the wish to be able to participate in the course at this stage in his life since he would appreciate it more fully now. ○

\* Griffith JD (2002), *To handle life's challenges: a tracer study of Servol's Adolescent Development Programme in Trinidad, Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections No. 16* (see page 59).