

Barbadian society in denial, says doctor



Dr Ermine Belle

Unless there is a recalibration of society's moral compass, clearly identifying the polar opposites of right and wrong, there would be a continued escalation of school violence.

This is the diagnosis of local psychiatrist Dr Ermine Belle, following the stabbing death of a student at Frederick Smith Secondary School last Friday at the hands of a fellow student.

This morning Belle told **Barbados TODAY** that any attempt to treat school violence in a vacuum would only yield short-term results. She contended that the problem was a systemic one, noting that

with 2019 being Barbados' bloodiest year recording 42 murders so far, it was not surprising that this was spilling over into the school system

"Talking about school violence alone would be just narrowing down the issues to one out of many. School violence comes from violence in society and unless we do something about curbing violence on a whole, then school violence will persist. These children were not born with violent thoughts or ordained to be violent, these children had exposure from their environment and their home. What we need to do is consciously realize that this society is violent," said Belle.

The respected psychiatrist argued that Barbados' violent society did not emerge overnight, but rather the slide took place gradually over the years, as Barbadians were in denial about the impact of the morality-numbing influences in society.

"People are going to be annoyed to hear me say this, but for years people have been in denial about the things that have been causing people to become distressed, causing people to go into a state of despair to the point where they stop feeling... People need to have standards and objectives for their children or that child will simply float where it is attractive and this might lead to wanting to be like the bad man in the neighborhood because it looks exciting and enriching," she said, pointing out that age-appropriate television viewing and video gaming, have now become out of fashion concepts.

Belle told **Barbados TODAY** that based on her professional practice, it is becoming increasingly apparent that long-valued precepts such as actions attracting consequences, no longer have any sway in today's society.

“These issues start from the time that you start ignoring values, you start ignoring the fact that there are things that are right and there are things that are wrong. I am not saying that there are no grey areas because there are grey areas, but those have to be identified and they have to be discussed.

“If a child takes a pencil and hides it in their bag and walks to school with it every day and there is no consequence because his parents never checked their bag, then that child starts to believe that he or she has not done anything wrong,” said Dr Belle.

She added, “This is something that I recognize very often in people that I see, they just don’t think down the road, they think for the moment. So, the action is done and everything as far as they are concerned is finished but is only afterwards that they realize that it is not finished. They wake up to the reality that there are many steps to follow after their action.

“This is one of the major problems that we have. Parents do not allow their children to realize that there is a consequence to their action. So, there are a number of things that we have neglected to keep as principles and to defend as moral behavior and until we do, we are going to continue to face the consequences of our actions.”

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