

Corporal Punishment as a Means of Discipline for Children

(A Case Study of District Nowshera, Kpk - Pakistan)

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Abstract

Corporal punishment means a physical contact designed to inflict pain or distress, usually referring to an adult inflicting pain on a child at home or at school. This paper examines the view that corporal punishment creates a sense of self-discipline in the child, through surveying teachers and students in District Nowshera in Pakistan. Proportionate random sampling technique was used for selection of schools and lottery for selection of 20 teachers and 80 students. Findings suggest that ninety percent of the teachers use punishment and almost half of these use corporal punishment. All of the students reported having experienced corporal punishment.

Keywords

Punishment, Discipline, Schools, Teachers, Students

Introduction

Corporal punishment can be defined as “any act of parents or caretaker which intended to cause physical pain or injury for the purposes of correction and control” (Cohen, 1978). Whipping children by means of rods or sticks or hitting with a slap or pulling ears or tying them up are all examples of corporal punishment (Ismail, 1998).

Most of the scientific studies reviewed support the argument that corporal punishment has harmful effects because it diminishes a child's confidence and can also lead to signs of gloominess and fretfulness. The other effect often cited is that the punishment may backfire by making the child seem to be a hero among his or her peers for improper activities (Erikson, 1999). According to the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth (1991): “Physical punishment may fabricate compliance for the small time, but if sustained for a longer time it can increase the possibility of hostile and aggressive behavior during childhood and adulthood” (Walt, 1991).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 19, also states that children should be protected from the maltreatment of parents and other guardians, and that each member country should establish programs to prevent the children from sufferings. It further says in Article 28 that each member state should take measures to decrease school dropout rates, and school disciplinary measures should ensure each child's human dignity (Maurer, 1999).

As this study was done in Pakistan, it is worth noting, as Ismail has done (1998), that corporal punishment of children is also against the teachings of Islam, in which the adult is instructed to show kindness towards children and treat them with love and affection (Ismail, 1998). However, in a strange contradiction, Section 89 of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) allows teachers, parents and other guardians to use physical punishment as a means to discipline a child less than 12 years of age. However, it also makes it clear that the punishment should not be so harsh as to seriously injure the child as defined in section 319 (hurt) and 320 (grievous) of the PPC, in which case the adults can be booked under section 323 and 325 of the PPC respectively and be penalized and imprisoned (Ismail, 1998).

Khan, Asad, Ahmed & Sajid(2014) found that corporal punishment fails to motivate students for studies. However, when administered after a mistake, corporal punishment also makes some students realize their mistakes. It creates hate amongst students against the teachers who use such violent methods of disciplining.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to identify the prevalence of the practice of corporal punishment in schools, the effects of punishment on the minds of students and to explore the relationship of corporal punishment to dropping out of school. These objectives are pursued through a survey with teachers and interviews with students.

Methodology

The universe of the study was District Nowshera of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. Proportionate random sampling technique was used to select the sample that was 100 respondents, including 80 students and 20 teachers. Keeping in view the nature of the study, a questionnaire was used with the teachers and an interview schedule was used with the students to collect the data. The exact location of the schools and respective teachers and students is kept confidential to ensure their personal and job security.

Findings: Teacher Respondents

Findings show that of the teacher respondents, 90% were in favor of giving punishment and only 10% were not in favor of giving punishment (See Table 1). Furthermore, 44% of the respondents who favored some kind of punishment (8 of the 18) referred to corporal punishment; the remaining 10 of the 18 (approximately 55%) preferred to giving fines. When the two teachers who disapproved of corporal punishment were asked what the reason was, one said that it creates a negative impact on the students, and the other said, because it creates no positive encouragement of students. Among those who reported using corporal punishment, most preferred to hit the children with sticks, one preferred to slap and no other method was reported (See Table 1).

In response to a question about the teachers' experience of training regarding child personality development, 55% of the teachers had never attended any such training. The rest (45%) had attended training on this topic (See Table 2).

A large majority (65%) of the teachers were of the view that corporal punishment is a traditional way of behavioral modification. Twenty five percent said they thought corporal punishment forces the students to get more knowledge, and 10% were of the view that it is a method recommended in the training for behavioral modification. Thus, even the two respondents who did not use corporal punishment had some belief in its being acceptable or recommended (See Table 3). Despite high levels of use and belief that corporal punishment is “traditional” and “recommended” among the respondents, nearly 60% said that students showed negative effects of such punishment while 40% said that students showed positive effects. The study further found that 58.5% of the 12 who saw negative effects opined that punishment resulted in dropouts; while 5 respondents of this group said that it discouraged the students psychologically (See Table 3).

Findings: Student Respondents

One hundred percent of the student respondents reported having been punished by teachers. The majority of the respondents (67.5%) had been punished “most of the time”, whereas 28.7% were punished “often” and 3.8% were punished “very rarely” (See Table 4).

In terms of the students' feelings toward teachers, 51.2 % reported that they love those teachers who want to guide them affectionately; 32.5% loved those teachers who give punishment only “for our mistakes”, whereas 16.3% were of the view that they love those teachers who guide them using harsh ways (See Table 5). The findings illustrated further in Table 5 show that the largest number of students, (37.5%) felt they had been punished for making a mistake, while 33.7% were punished for being weak in studies and 28.8% were punished for incomplete class work.

Regarding severity or type of punishment reported, the large majority of the students, 71.3% reported having been punished by sticks, and 15 of the students, (18.7%) were punished by slapping or kicking. Seven respondents or 8.7% were punished by having their ears pulled, while only one respondent was punished through shaming (See Table 6). The table further shows that 20 of the 57 students who had been punished with sticks (35.1%) had been punished this way up to three times, 42.1% of this group had been punished four or five times, and 23 % reported having been punished using sticks more than 5 times.

The majority of the respondents, i.e. 63.7%, said that their class fellows left the school due to corporal punishment, while 36.3% said that students don't leave the school due to corporal punishment (See Table 7). This disparity shows a widely held belief among students that corporal punishment leads to leaving school.

Discussions of Findings Regarding Teachers

The study results showed that the majority (90 %) of the teachers favored the use of punishment to reprimand and discipline students, believing it to be essential or normal for the promotion of improved socially desirable behavior and educational effort. The majority of those favoring punishment preferred corporal punishment, specifically favoring hitting the student with a stick or slapping the student in the face; 56% of those favoring punishment overall, favored fines as the punishment of choice.

Among the twenty teachers who were surveyed for the study, only two of them said that they were not in favor of corporal punishment. The reasons they gave were that corporal punishment creates negative impact on the students and the students who were punished in this way indulged in more negative deeds; and that instead of encouraging students; corporal punishment kills students' enthusiasm. Although the views of these teachers reveal that they personally had a good understanding of the internationally recognized impact of corporal punishment and agreed with it and presumably attempted to follow those views, there is no indication that their views had any impact on how widely corporal punishment was practiced in the district.

Training in child development might have been effective to lead the teachers to abandon the practice of corporal punishment, (because child personality development experts recommend against it and recommend alternatives,) but less than half of the teachers surveyed had attended such training; the majority (55%) had never attended such training. In the absence of training programs for teachers on child personality development one can understand that many had no access to alternative methods in their own repertoire of skills for helping the children who needed guidance to improve their efforts and behavior.

In the views of the most of the surveyed teachers, corporal punishment is a traditional way used to modify the behavior of students. Further, it was the view of the majority of the teachers that corporal punishment helps in “forcing” a child towards success in education, and improved behavior. In fact, many reported that the corporal punishment was endorsed by the child personality development trainings that they had attended. Thus, even the two respondents discussed above who were not in favor of corporal punishment held the view that it is an acceptable and recommended norm in their profession. If these reports regarding the educational and personality development training they receive are accurate, these training practices may fall contrary to many international standards and treaties.

The effects of corporal punishment in the views of the majority of the respondents were negative and even resulted in students dropping out of school; some have also reported important negative impact in the form of psychologically discouraging the students from taking interest in their studies. Both results, i.e. dropping out and creation of lack of interest in studies, confirm, through this study, the international consensus that corporal punishment gravely undermines the goal of educating a child. While there were some teachers in whose views the use of corporal punishment led to positive effects (students became more disciplined and more attentive in studies), the improvements they saw may be attributed to the students' fear of future pain and thus, be short-lived gains.

Discussions of the Findings Regarding Students

All students reported being punished by their teachers in schools “most of the time”, and that as a result they felt hatred against the teachers who punished them. But others were of the view that after being punished they realized their mistake and were not angry or offensive towards their teachers. So the students were confused about whether to hate the teacher who punishes them for their bad deeds or not to be angry with such teachers, to see the punishment as having helped to motivate them to improve their behavior. But most students did report that they liked those teachers who guide them affectionately.

The reasons the students reported for their being punished included making mistakes in classroom and carelessness in studies. The type of punishment they received for these misdeeds encompasses not only beating with stick, pulling ears, slapping and receiving kicks but also causing them shame in front of their class fellows. The frequency of being beaten with stick was reportedly more than any other form of punishment. The consequences reported by the students should give rise to concerns by all parents, educators and the educational establishment.

The students also reported that this type of corporal punishment resulted in students dropping out of schools. This is a very serious and undesirable repercussion, especially for a developing country. In Pakistan, where schools and the educational establishment work hard to overcome the tendency for many people to prefer for their children to be earning a living right from childhood, and not to get a school education, this finding should raise a widespread concern among those dedicated to the education of the children, and eventually, the population as a whole.

Implications for Practice and Policy

It is clear that despite international recommendations, corporal punishment is widely used in the schools of Nowshera District. Although most teachers believe it is the recommended thing to do, many also wish there were alternatives. These

findings suggest that teachers should be provided with compulsory trainings (in-service and even before joining to prepare them for the job) on international standards and treaties related to children and human rights and on developing alternative skills for enhancing children's constructive involvement in classroom and studies. As most of the teachers had not attended teachers training regarding personality development of the students, thus such training programs for teachers with emphasis on psychological development of children without the use of physical punishment should be made available by the government.

As per the responses of the most of the teachers, the effects of corporal punishments on students were negative, so the government should make policies and laws to combat the practice of corporal punishment in schools. It might have a long term beneficial effect if the use of corporal punishment in the home were also to be banned, as it is in many countries. In this regard, both public and private sectors could join hands to promote such a dramatic change in widespread practices throughout society.

The students reported that they are mostly punished when they make a mistake, or show weak results in studies and do not complete their studies, such problems can also be overcome by engaging School Social Workers (SSWs) which is still a neglected field in Pakistan. SSWs can be appointed in every public and private schools, to work along with parents and teachers to solve the problems of students in their education, discipline and character building. The SSW can also be involved in trainings of teachers on international human rights laws and practice, and even in promoting child rearing practices at home that de-emphasize physical punishment. Thus the government should take serious steps to safeguard the children of the country in schools and at home both.

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Annexure

Table 1: Teachers' Views Regarding Punishment and Types of Punishments they Usually Give to Students.

In favor of giving punishment	Freq. & %	If yes, then what type of punishment you will prefer most			Freq. & %	If not in favor of corporal punishment why?		Freq. & %	Types of Punishment Usually Given to Students	Freq. & %
		Fine	Corporal	Torture Mentally		Creates Negative Effect on Students	No positive Encouragement in Corporal Punishment			
Yes	18 (90%)	10	8	0	18 (100%)	1	1	2 (100%)	Slap	1 (10%)
No	02 (10%)	-	-	-		-	-	-	Beating with Sticks	9 (90%)
Total	20	10	8	0	10	50	50	2		10

Table 2: Teachers' Training Regarding Child Personality Development

Have you Attended the Training Regarding Child Personality Development	Frequency	%
Yes	9	45
No	11	55
Total	20	100

Table 3: Teachers' Views Regarding Corporal Punishment and its Longer Effects on Children

What do you Think about Corporal Punishment	Freq. & %	Effect of Corporal Punishment on Children	Freq. & %	If Negative Effects	
				Students are Discouraged Psychologically	It Results in Drop Outs
It's a method recommended in training	02 (10%)	Positive	08 (40%)	-	-
Its traditional way of modification	13 (65%)	Negative	12 (60%)	05 of 12	7 of 12
It forces students to get more knowledge	05 (25%)	Total	20	-	-
		%	100	41.5 of those who saw negative effects	58.5 of those who saw negative effects

Table 4: Students Respondents' Reports on Whether they are Punished and How Frequently

Whether Punished	Freq. & %	If Yes, Then When			Freq.
		Most of time	Often	Very rarely	
Yes	80 (100%)	54	23	03	80 (100%)
No	0	0	0	0	0
Total	80 (100%)	54	23	03	80 (100%)
%		67.5	28.7	3.8	-

Table 5: Type of teacher liked by students and students reported reasons of punishments

Type of teacher loved by the students	Freq. & %	For what reasons did your teacher punished you	Freq. & %
Who give punishment only on our mistake	26 (32.5%)	When you make mistake	30 (37.5%)
Who guide us affectionately	41 (51.2%)	Weak in studies	27 (33.7%)
Who guide us through harsh ways	13 (16.3%)	Incomplete class work	23 (28.8%)
Total	80 (100%)		80 (100%)

Table 6: Student Reports on Method of Punishment, and if by Sticks then How Often

How you are Punished by Teacher	Freq.	%	If by sticks, how many times		
			Up to 3 times	Up to 5 times	More than 5 times
By sticks	57	71.3	20	24	13
Slap / Kicking	15	18.7	0	0	0
Pulling ears	7	8.7	0	0	0
Shaming	1	1.3	-	-	-
Total	80	100.0	20	24	13
%		100.0	35.1	42.1	22.8

Table 7: Students' View that Class Fellow Ever left the School due to Corporal Punishment

Have Your Class Fellow Left the School	Freq.	%
Yes	51	63.7
No	29	36.3
Total	80	100

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