



“SPARE THE ROD AND SPOIL THE CHILD” - IS CORPORAL PUNISHMENT MORALLY AND LEGALLY JUSTIFIED IN UGANDAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS? A CASE OF GULU DISTRICT.

Charles Nyakito

National Teachers' College, Unyama, P. O. Box 541, Gulu, Uganda

Daniel Allida*

University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, P. O. Box 2500-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

*Corresponding Author: Email address - allidad@ueab.ac.ke

Abstract

‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’ has been a philosophy of child rearing strongly held by both professionals and laymen. Corporal punishment in schools is not only a Ugandan problem but is a worldwide problem as well. The theory that corporal punishment is used as a disciplinary method to change behavior – “spare the rod and spoil the child” - cannot be condoned any more in this 21st century when children’s rights are regulated by conventions and national laws. Children subjected to corporal punishment suffer from lowered self-esteem, clinical depression and suicidal ideation, all so that teachers can instill fear and artificial control. Aside from the negative psychological effects, the use of corporal punishment has negative implications as it teaches children that it is acceptable and sometimes necessary to solve problems using violence. With that said, school administrators, teachers, and all persons who work with young people instill high levels of moral capacities and obedience onto children only for them to grow up into a world that applies force and violence at every nonconforming moment. Corporal punishment is wrong, but the hypocrisy in the Ugandan culture on the issue drives a wedge in the progress towards eliminating the vice. This study sought to highlight the negative social/psychological long term effects of corporal punishment and what can be done to wean out the vice in schools.

Keywords: Corporal punishment, “spare the rod spoil the child”

Introduction

The 2014 national study on ‘Assessing Child Protection Safety and Security Issues for Children in Uganda’ found out inter alia that: “Corporal punishment was common in Schools with seven out of every ten children were subjected to caning by teachers, apparently under the pretext of pushing them to attain higher academic grades” (Kibuuka, 2015, p. 3).

Until 1998, corporal punishment was not directly addressed in Ugandan law. With the Guidelines for Universal Primary Education, 1998, article 3.4 (iii), Uganda adopted a policy stating that corporal punishment should not be used in schools (Bategeka & Okurut, 2006).

On 7 August 2006, the Director of Education issued a statement that expressly forbade corporal punishment in any school in Uganda and affirmed that anyone ignoring these guidelines would be held accountable in the courts of law (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009). Although this policy increased the awareness of corporal punishment practices in Uganda, it did not unambiguously

prohibit the practice by law. In 2012, the Committee on the Rights of the Child of Uganda advocated for the State of Uganda to explicitly prohibit by law all forms of corporal punishment (Uganda Country Report, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Corporal punishment was declared illegal in Uganda by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2006, but there are still numerous reports of incidents of caning of children by educators in schools. This makes the researchers question whether this policy is actually being monitored or regulated.

In recent times, different media outlets have been awash with stories of youngsters nursing both psychological and physical wounds as a result of this vicious form of punishment. Most notable among such stories include: First, the story of Yowaana Yakubu, a 13-year old pupil from Nagombwa Primary School in Iganga District, who was beaten to death by a fellow pupil under the instructions of his teacher



(Oluka, 2014). Secondly, the story of a teacher who caned and wrestled down a 12-year old pupil, who in the process lost his tooth (Oluka, 2014). The third case was that of a 10-year old primary six pupil at one of the boarding schools in Mukono District, who was brutally caned by two teachers simultaneously. The effect of the beating was so severe that the girl had to be hospitalized for two weeks at Nsambya Hospital. She developed a temporary disability in one of her legs and lost one school term as well (Oluka, 2014). Last, but not least, the fourth case was that of Sobra Namugga, a Primary Four pupil from Nabuyonga Primary School. Namugga lost an eye after a piece of stick fell in her eye while her teacher was furiously hitting the desk. It is alleged that Namugga and her classmates were making noise and therefore, the teacher hit the desk several times as a way of silencing them. He later defended himself by stating that it was an accident (Oluka, 2014).

The researcher believes there could be many other similar cases of child abuse and violent acts against children out there that are simply not reported and brought to the limelight. Such barbaric acts need to be brought to an immediate halt to make schools attractive and learner friendly.

Research Questions

The research study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the prevalence of corporal punishment in secondary schools in Gulu district?
2. What are the major reasons for which teachers mete out corporal punishment in secondary schools in Gulu district?
3. What are the most common forms of corporal punishment meted to students in Gulu district?
4. What are the arguments for and against the use of corporal punishments in secondary schools in Gulu district?

Theoretical Framework

The study was informed on the basis of Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y sets of assumptions about behavior of people at work (McGregor, 1960). These theories, though relating to people at work, can be applied to students in regard to discipline.

Theory X assumptions are that individuals are generally lazy and dislike work and as such, they should be coerced in order to work. This, in relation to

students, means that they dislike work in form of the assignments given by teachers and duties assigned to them, such as manual work. Perceived this way, students therefore have to be coerced to work. The forms of coercion therefore, according to the theory, necessitate the use various forms of punishment including the outlawed corporal punishment.

Theory Y on the other hand assumes that employees are not inherently lazy and view work as natural as rest or play. This implies that students are not lazy and will do the assignments and their manual work as they view it as naturally what they are expected to do and the sole reason as to why they are in school.

Research Design

This study used mixed methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) design, which is a procedure for collecting, analyzing and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study, to understand the research problem more completely (Creswell, 2002). The rationale for mixing was that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone would be sufficient by themselves to capture the trends and details of a complex issue such as the persistence of corporal punishments in schools in Uganda. When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for more complete analysis (Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Research Population and Sample

The research study population was composed of 350 teachers teaching in and around Gulu Municipal Council secondary schools. A sample of 64 teachers was drawn from eleven secondary schools using proportionate stratified sampling technique.

Research Instruments

The research study employed self-administered questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions distributed to the entire research sample. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with the Director of Studies in each sample school.



Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

The validity of the research instruments was ascertained by partnering with a research expert at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton who critically examined the instruments to ascertain the content validity. A pilot study was conducted using 30 teachers from a non-participating school and the questionnaire responses were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha test of reliability. The questionnaire yielded a reliability coefficient of

0.82, which was considered high enough. According to Orodho (2009), an alpha coefficient of about 0.60 is acceptable to judge the reliability of an instrument.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussions that follow herein are based on the research questions that were stated earlier on in the research questions section of this manuscript.

Table 1

The Prevalence of Corporal Punishments in Secondary Schools in Gulu District

S/N	Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1	Yourself	1.59	Sometimes
2	Other teachers	2.31	Sometimes
3	Director of Studies (DOS)	2.30	Sometimes
4	Matron	1.95	Sometimes
5	Class Teachers	2.31	Sometimes
6	Teachers in charge of discipline	2.36	Sometimes
7	Head Teacher	1.59	Sometimes

Table 1 above shows the teachers' responses to the research question: What is the prevalence of corporal punishment in secondary schools in Gulu district? The results show that all personnel who work in schools are engaged in meting out corporal punishments to the students. There seems to be no particular category of personnel who mete out corporal punishment at a greater magnitude than the rest because the responses all seemed to be centred around "sometimes." If all the personnel who work in educational institutions are engaged in meting out corporal punishment to students, then this gives an indication that corporal punishment is prevalent in our schools. A study in Uganda that surveyed 1400 children and nearly 1100 adults about their experiences with violence, punishment, and discipline, revealed the common practice of corporal punishment throughout the country. The survey stated that more than 98% of the children reported experiencing corporal punishment, More than a third of the children said they experienced it at least once a week, and more than 60 % said they experienced it at school regularly (Naker, 2005).

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis of re-

sponses to research question two. The research question two was: What are the major reasons for which teachers mete out corporal punishment in secondary schools in Gulu district? The reasons to which the teachers agreed are responsible for educators meting out corporal punishment in schools included : bullying others, fighting in school, stealing school or other students' property, disciplining students, disobedience, being disrespectful, and not doing class exercises (Means: 2.97, 2.95, 2.86, 2.80, 2.80, 2.77 and 2.67 respectively). These results corroborate with the results of a study conducted in Uganda in 2006 involving 500 young women from 18 to 24 years old regarding their childhood experiences of violence (African Child Policy Forum, 2006). The study revealed that the girls were beaten for being late, misbehaving, or for being disrespectful. Naker (2006) points out that most Ugandan adults, when probed about thoughts on beating children, will respond "What is wrong with beating children to teach them how to behave?" This is mainly because many Ugandans have experienced physical violence themselves as children in order to be disciplined.



Table 2

The Reasons for which Corporal Punishments are Meted out in Secondary Schools in Gulu District

S/N	Reasons	Mean	Interpretation
1	Disciplining Students	2.80	Agree
2	Being Late in Class	2.42	Disagree
3	Being Absent in Class	2.32	Disagree
4	Disobedience	2.80	Agree
5	Performing Poorly in Class	2.22	Disagree
6	Fighting in School	2.95	Agree
7	Bullying Others	2.97	Agree
8	Speaking Vernacular in School	2.28	Disagree
9	Stealing School or other students' property	2.86	Agree
10	Intimate Relationship with Opposite Sex	2.44	Disagree
11	Not Doing Class Exercises	2.67	Agree
12	Being Disrespectful	2.77	Agree

Table 3 is a summary of the teachers' responses to the research question 3: What are the most common forms of corporal punishment meted to students in secondary schools in Gulu district?

Table 3

Forms of Corporal Punishments Meted out in Secondary Schools in Gulu District

S./N	Forms of Corporal Punishment	Mean	Interpretation
1	Caning	2.58	Often
2	Spanking	1.98	Sometimes
3	Pinching	2.13	Sometimes
4	Slapping	2.91	Often
5	Hitting the child with an object	1.70	Sometimes
6	Kicking	1.70	Sometimes
7	Smacking	1.84	Sometimes
8	Kneeling before class	2.00	Sometimes
9	Frog Jumping	2.09	Sometimes
10	Forced Labor: eg. slashing, uprooting stump	2.89	Often
11	Acts that are intended to belittle or humiliate, abusive language	2.48	Sometimes

The results show that the forms of corporal punishments with the highest mean at the level of 'Often' in the Likert measurement scale were slapping (Mean = 2.91), forced labour (Mean = 2.89) and caning (Mean = 2.58) However, the analysis also reveals that all the other forms of corporal punishment are equally sometimes meted out. The information provided by the teachers corroborates with the results of a study that was conducted in public and private primary schools in 2011 involving 1015 students between 13 to 18years

of age. 81% of the students reported having been beaten at school while many others also reported having received different forms of punishments at school including being denied food for extended periods of time, being locked in a room, and being forced to kneel in front of other students at school (ANPPCAN Uganda, 2011).

Table 4 shows that the teachers agreed with several justifications for meting out corporal punishments to students in secondary schools in Gulu district.

Table 4

Justification for Meting out Corporal Punishment in Secondary Schools in Gulu District

S./N	Justification	Mean	Interpretation
1	Corporal punishment is the only most effective means of instilling discipline in students.	2.23	Disagree
2	If you spare the rod, you spoil the child. Children must be flogged in order to mould them.	2.45	Disagree
3	Without pain, there is no gain. Students learn better when they associate learning with pain.	2.08	Disagree
4	I am successful in life because of the beatings of my own teachers and early care givers.	2.52	Agree
5	Corporal punishment is used in the military to coerce spies or other opponents to talk. It is also used in many prison systems around the world as a means of keeping the prisoners restrained. Why not in schools	2.05	Disagree
6	There is moral decadence in schools today because of child rights activists and ban on corporal punishments	2.75	Agree
7	Without corporal punishments in schools, students see teachers as powerless.	2.57	Agree
8	Parents urge teachers and school authorities to help them discipline stubborn children at school.	2.95	Agree
9	Corporal punishment is justified as last resort.	2.81	Agree
10	Because it works. There is no equivalent that acts as both a punishment and deterrent in the same way.	2.38	Disagree
11	Corporal punishment is justified as long as it is properly regulated.	2.66	Agree
12	Corporal punishment can be administered quickly. The pupil can then continue with his or her learning, unlike other forms of punishment, such as suspension from school when they miss school time and their education is damaged.	2.56	Agree
13	Corporal punishment is an effective use of staff time, unlike other forms of punishment, such as detentions, when hours of staff time can be wasted supervising students who have misbehaved.	2.41	Disagree
14	Corporal punishment is biblical, e.g. "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from hell." (Prov 23:13)	2.33	Disagree

Among the justifications they agreed with included: Parents urge teachers and school authorities to help them discipline stubborn children at school (Mean = 2.95), Corporal punishment is justified as last resort (Mean = 2.81), There is moral decadence in schools today because of child rights activists and ban on corporal punishments (Mean = 2.75), Corporal punishment is justified as long as it is properly regulated (Mean = 2.66), Without corporal punishments in schools, students see teachers as powerless (Mean = 2.57), Corporal punishment can be administered quickly. The pupil can then continue with his or her learning, unlike other forms of punishment, such as suspension from school when they miss school time and their education is damaged (Mean = 2.56), and I am successful in life because of the beatings of my own teachers and early

care givers.

The teachers' arguments in support of corporal punishments in schools are not isolated or unique. Sometimes the arguments are based on unfounded beliefs such as "Spare the rod and spoil the child, without pain there is no gain (Republic of Uganda, 2012). Some proponents of corporal punishment even attempt to solemnify corporal punishment by linking it to religious doctrines. The verses often quoted in support of corporal punishment include: (The authorship is traditionally attributed to King Solomon)

- "He who spareth his rod hateth his son, but he who loveth him is chasteneth him betimes." (King Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs [13:24].
- "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a

child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him." (Proverbs 22:15)

- "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod. And deliver his soul from hell." (Proverbs 23:13)

Table 5 is the summary of the analysis of the teachers' responses to the question: What are the arguments against the use of corporal punishments in secondary schools in Gulu district? The results show that the respondents were in agreement with all the proposed arguments against corporal punishments in schools. These results show that the teachers are aware of the negative consequences of corporal punishments on the students, much as they mete them out on their very students. Indeed many authors and scholars have always argued against corporal punishments. Kibuuka (2015) asserts that psychologically, corporal punishment causes depression, lowers self-esteem of students, causes pessimism among students and prevails apprehension. Corporal punishment also causes personality disorders among learners as it suppresses students' potentials for growth and development, impulsions and emotional instability and necessitation of students towards insurgency and non-compromising behaviour and a source of social mal-adjustment. Other researchers who oppose corporal punishment on the basis that it can have emotional and psychological consequences to the child include: Benjet and Kazdin (2003), Gershoff (2002), Gromoske and Maguire-Jack (2012), Hicks-Pass (2009), Larzelere and Kuhn (2005), McLoyd and Smith (2002), Straus (2001), Simons and Wurtele (2010), and Turner and Muller (2004).

Table 6 below presents a summary of the analysis of the respondents' answers to the question: What are the other effective, non-violent alternatives to corporal punishments? The results show that the respondents agreed with all the proposed alternatives to corporal punishment. The ranking of the alternatives according to the means from the highest is as follows: Meeting parents or guardians of students to discuss behavior and academic problems of individual students (Mean = 3.41), Discussing with individual student to identify the root causes of unique behavior before attempting to address such behaviors (Mean = 3.34), Conducting regular guidance and counseling with individuals, groups and whole class (Mean = 3.33), Teachers' role modeling the kind of behavior they wish the students to imitate (Mean = 3.31), Formulating class/schools rules and regulations together with students or student representatives and clearly explaining to the students the implications of such rules (Mean = 3.27), Teachers being empathetic and supportive to all the learners without any discrimination (Mean = 3.23), Asking students to apologize to those offended by a misdeed, a class, the teacher, etc verbally or in writing (Mean = 3.20). Addressing some critical unbecoming behaviors in the school through school assemblies such as bullying, late coming, truancy, lesbianism, etc. (Mean = 3.16), Creating a forum through which students can share their concerns in the school such as suggestion boxes (Mean = 3.14), and Denying the student certain privileges for a mischief such as failing to do homework or late coming (Mean = 2.53).

Table 5

Arguments Against Corporal Punishments on Students in Secondary Schools in Gulu District

S/N	Arguments against corporal punishments	Mean	Interpretation
1	Corporal punishment leads to lifelong psychological damage manifested as depression, inhibition, rigidity, heightened anxiety and suicidal thoughts.	3.12	Agree
2	Corporal punishment makes children lose interest, resent the learning experience, and as a result, do not value education.	3.00	Agree
3	Corporal punishment makes children learn to hate a subject or teacher because education does not thrive when children live in fear of those who teach them.	3.05	Agree
4	With corporal punishment, being absent from school and the risk of drop outs increases.	2.81	Agree
5	Corporal punishment fosters cruelty and violence then later on increase in crime rates.	2.87	Agree
6	Corporal punishment leads to increase in costs of treating injured children. When children are injured from corporal punishment, the school must take responsibility for paying the medical expenses.	2.80	Agree
7	Children who experiences corporal punishment develop feelings of low self-worth and as a result can become unproductive adults.	2.83	Agree
8	Corporal punishment instills fear among learners and so they find it difficult to freely relate and interact with the teacher.	3.12	Agree
9	Corporal punishment can permanently maim and traumatize a student.	3.00	Agree
10	Corporal punishment can lead to the death of a student.	3.05	Agree
11	Corporal punishment on the buttocks is sexual violation.	2.81	Agree
12	There are other non-violent better ways of dealing with students' mischief.	2.87	Agree
13	Corporal punishment reflects a breakdown in communication and failure to engage students.	2.80	Agree
14	Corporal punishment of students is analogous to wife beating. If wife beating is inhuman, then corporal punishment is inhuman.	2.83	Agree
15	Students who are subjected to corporal punishment are likely to condone it in later life and subject others under them to similar treatment.	2.87	Agree
16	Corporal punishment violates the rights of children.	2.80	Agree



Table 6

Alternatives to Corporal Punishments in Schools

S/N	Alternatives to Corporal Punishments	Mean	Interpretation
1	Conducting regular guidance and counseling with individuals, groups and whole class.	3.33	Agree
2	Meeting parents or guardians of students to discuss behavior and academic problems of individual students.	3.41	Agree
3	Discussing with individual student to identify the root causes of unique behavior before attempting to address such behaviors.	3.34	Agree
4	Formulating class/schools rules and regulations together with students or student representatives and clearly explaining to the students the implications of such rules.	3.27	Agree
5	Asking students to apologize to those offended by a misdeed, a class, the teacher, etc verbally or in writing.	3.20	Agree
6	Addressing some critical unbecoming behaviors in the school through school assemblies such as bullying, late coming, truancy, lesbianism, etc.	3.16	Agree
7	Teachers' role modeling the kind of behavior they wish the students to imitate.	3.31	Agree
8	Teachers being empathetic and supportive to all the learners without any discrimination.	3.23	Agree
9	Creating a forum through which students can share their concerns in the school such as suggestion boxes.	3.14	Agree
10	Denying the student certain privileges for a mischief such as failing to do homework or late coming.	2.53	Agree

The agreement of the respondents with the proposals for alternatives to corporal punishments is in line with UNICEF's advocacy towards creating safer schools through positive discipline. UNICEF argues that children are people too, they respond better to positive actions like guidance instead of harsh punishment or abuse. They will learn the lesson better when they are not in pain (Republic of Uganda, 2013). The reason why schools should adopt alternatives to cor-

poral punishments as a means of disciplining children and encouraging them to work hard in school is because schools should be safe places for children so that they can learn. Violence and abuse in schools defeats the purpose of education. It forces children to drop out, perform badly in class and fail to succeed in their life long education (Republic of Uganda, 2013). There have been repeated calls to teachers and other care givers to young people to abandon corpo-



ral punishments and instead resort to more friendly means of disciplining children. Kibuuka (2015) makes such appeal when he wrote that teachers should work together with parents to stop corporal punishment inflicted on students and rather strengthen rapport with students, step-up guidance and counseling services in schools, teacher-parenting clubs should be established in schools to help students stay in school and achieve their full academic potential.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide overarching evidence to enable drawing the following conclusions:

1. Corporal punishment is quite prevalent in all secondary schools in and around Gulu District. It is meted out on students by all the personnel who work in the educational institutions particularly teachers in charge of discipline and class teachers.
2. The main reasons why corporal punishment is meted on students are to discipline the child, to serve as deterrent for bad behaviors in school and to force students to work hard in their academics.
3. The common forms of corporal punishment meted out are caning, slapping, and forced labor.
4. The teachers believed that experiencing corporal punishment would eventually help the students become successful in life.
5. They believed that teachers are powerless if Corporal Punishment is not used.
6. All the respondents agreed that the use of corporal punishment was undesirable and had negative consequences on the students.
7. All of them agreed that there were other effective and learner friendly alternatives to the meting out of corporal punishments which could assist in disciplining children.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that instead of resorting to corporal punishment, teachers need to learn alternative discipline techniques that are effective and respectful in order to manage their students.
2. Organizations that advocate the prohibition

- of corporal punishment in schools should support the government to sensitize the teachers against their physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological abuse of children.
3. The schools need to develop channels of communication between students, parents and teachers for purposes of dealing with students' issues at school.
 4. In 2012, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports released the Alternatives to Corporal Punishment Handbook. The resource is incredibly helpful in offering alternative methods for teachers to use in order to discipline their students. However, this resource has not been disseminated to schools throughout the country. The researcher recommends urgent country-wide dissemination of the resource to empower the teachers.
 5. Finally, the researcher would like to recommend further research in the area of corporal punishment in schools so as to expose to the public the unknown about the vice in our school system. By eliminating corporal punishment in Ugandan schools, the youth of today will be empowered to stay in school and become the leaders of tomorrow.

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