

Corporal Punishment in Schools: A Case Study of Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research on corporal punishment in Pakistan is quite limited. The act of punishment negatively impacts a child's socio-psychological, emotional, and educational wellbeing. Building upon qualitative research, this paper attempts to assess teachers and students' understanding of: "The Gilgit Baltistan Prohibition of Corporal Punishment against Children Act, 2015". It also documents student's experiences along with their perceptions of the phenomena. Data reveals that verbal as well as physical abuse are common. The prevalence of physical and verbal abuse is age and gender specific as boys and girls experience different types of punishments. The study concludes that corporal punishment in public schools in Danyor is practiced owing to: a) lack of positive disciplinary tools; b) social acceptance of corporal punishment; and c) unawareness of its negative consequences on the personality, cognitive, and learning skills of the students. Educational staff needs

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customized training to save students from corporal punishment and its effects.

Introduction

Corporal punishment is interpreted as an act of inflicting pain on some one to stop or change bad behaviours. The obsolete French variant of 'corporal', and also the Italian word 'caporale', based on Latin 'corpus', corpore 'body' (of troops), with a change of spelling due to its association with capo 'head' is very likely the origin of the word 'corporal'. Spanking, slapping or hitting with different objects are the common forms of corporal punishment.¹ Corporal punishment is not only prevalent in schools rather it is also practiced in homes and workplaces, and is considered as one of the widespread practices of violence exercised against children.²

According to the U.N Committee on Rights of the Child (CRC) 2007, "Corporal punishment is a type of punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort."³ The Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), particularly Article 19, guarantees safety from all kinds of violence.⁴

Anthropological literature gives comparison of punishment in which out of 104 societies, including advanced ones, 13

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- 1 Loretta Cicognani, "To Punish or Discipline? Teachers' Attitudes towards the Abolition of Corporal Punishment," (Johannesburg: Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 2004), 60.
 - 2 "Corporal Punishment of Children in Pakistan," *Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children*, 2020, 13.
<http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/Pakistan.pdf>
 - 3 Committee on the Rights of Child, "General Comment no. 8(2006):The Right of the Child to Protection from Corporal Punishment and Other Cruel or Degrading Forms of Punishment (Arts. 19; 28, Para. 2; and 37, inter alia)" (*Geneva: UN Committee on Rights of Child (CRC), 2007*), 15.
<https://www.refworld.org/docid/460bc7772.html>.
 - 4 United Nations Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," *United Nations Human Rights*, 1990,15.
<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>

use physical punishment.⁵ The roots of corporal punishment go back to the period of the Greeks and the Romans. During that time, it was administered not only on children but also on adults too.⁶ Children were considered as the “property of their guardians” by Ancient Greeks.⁷ It was believed that acute physical punishment was compulsory to maintain order and to appease supernatural forces.⁸

Approximately 128 countries have legally prohibited corporal punishment in educational institutions while 69 countries still practice it, and Pakistan is one of them.⁹ Corporal punishment has been observed in various socio-cultural contexts i.e. USA, Japan, Morocco, Thailand, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, South Korea, Palestine, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Israel, South Africa, Ghana, Brazil, Kenya, and Tanzania.¹⁰ Scandinavian countries such as Sweden was the pioneer to ban corporal punishment.¹¹ In the South Asian context, teachers take corporal punishment as legal to ensure discipline.¹² Every year globally, almost one billion children (2-14 years) are abused by their care-givers on daily basis. The children suffering from physical and verbal abuse

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- 5 Murray Last, “Children and the Experience of Violence: Contrasting Cultures of Punishment in Northern Nigeria,” *Africa* 70, no. 3 (2000): 359-393.
 - 6 Nayab Ali *et. al.*, “Corporal Punishment: Parents Perception in District Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan,” *Peshawar Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences (PJPBS)* 1, no. 2 (2015): 137.
 - 7 Safdar Hussain, “The Impact of Corporal Punishment on Students in Public Sector Schools: A Case Study of Boys School in Multan,” (Peshawar: Ph.D. Diss., University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan, 2015).
 - 8 Janet Elizabeth Rice, “The Attitude of Teachers towards Corporal Punishment,” (Ph. D. Diss., 1987).
 - 9 Elizabeth T. Gershoff, “School Corporal Punishment in Global Perspective; Prevalence, Outcomes and Efforts at Interventions,” *Psychology Health and Medicine* 22, no. 1 (2017): 224-239.
 - 10 Cicognani, “To Punish or Discipline? Teachers’, 60.
 - 11 Ali, *et. al.*, “Corporal Punishment,” 137.
 - 12 Gershoff, “School Corporal Punishment in Global Perspective,”.

have high risk of school dropout, rebellious attitude, suicidal behaviors and other psychological problems.¹³

In Pakistan, corporal punishment is legalized in educational institutes under article 89 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860.¹⁴ The relevant government departments have issued directives to public schools on the prohibition of corporal punishment, however, appropriate legislation is still missing. In February 2020, the Islamabad High Court suspended Section 89 of the Penal Code and the Federal Cabinet approved the bill banning corporal punishment which will be presented in the National Assembly.¹⁵

Corporal punishment in schools has been linked with cognitive and psychological issues in children. The United Nations have pinpointed some cases of students who lost their lives due to corporal punishment in schools.¹⁶ In Pakistan, corporal punishment is one of the main reasons behind school dropouts. It is inter-linked with poor grades, lack of confidence and mental health problems like depression. A study indicated that corporal punishment is more prevalent in boys school as compared to girls school in Pakistan.¹⁷

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- 13 Delores E. Smith, "Corporal Punishment of Children in the Jamaican Context," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016): 27-44.
 - 14 Pakistan Penal Code, "Pakistan Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860)" (*Constitution of Pakistan, Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 1860*), 175. <https://www.oecd.org/site/adboecdanti-corruptioninitiative/46816797.pdf>
 - 15 "Corporal Punishment of Children in Pakistan," *Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2020*, 13. <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/Pakistan.pdf>.
 - 16 Gershoff, "School Corporal Punishment in Global Perspective," 224-239.
 - 17 Khuwaja et. al., "The Intersection of School Corporal Punishment and Associated Factors: Baseline Results from a Randomized Controlled trial in Pakistan," *PLOS ONE*, 13, no. 10 (2018). <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0206032>

Every year, about 35,000 children dropout from schools owing to corporal punishment.¹⁸ Most incidents go unreported.¹⁹ Almost three quarters of Pakistanis think, it is religiously approved to beat their kids for their misconduct.²⁰ About 70 percent of school teachers consider corporal punishment good for disciplining the students. Undermining its worse consequences, many parents also approve it.²¹

Corporal punishment is prevalent in 40 percent of the government schools and 35 percent of the private schools of Pakistan.²² According to the UNICEF, 85 percent of children in Gilgit Baltistan experience some form of psychological oppression and physical punishment as a disciplinary measure. Of all being subjected to physical punishment, 25 percent are subjected to severe physical punishment, 81 percent face psychological aggression and only 9 percent are subjected to non-violent disciplinary practices.²³

The government has banned corporal punishment in schools. In 2020, the Federal High Court rejected the article 89 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860 which legalizes corporal punishment in the educational institutions of Pakistan.²⁴ This

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- 18 Ephias Gudyanga, F. Mbengo and N. Wadesango, "Corporal Punishment in Schools: Issues and Challenges," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no.9 (2014): 493-500.
- 19 "Corporal Punishment of Children in Pakistan," *Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children*, 2020, 13.
- 20 United Nation International Children Emergency Fund, "Situation Analysis of Pakistan," (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2017) 200.
<https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/596/file/Situation%20Analysis%20of%20Children%20in%20Pakistan.pdf>.
- 21 Rukhsana Shah, "Punishing Children," *DAWN*, 2017, Accessed September 22, 2019.
https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=26_07_2017_009_001.
- 22 Hussain, "The Impact of Corporal Punishment on Students in Public Sector Schools,".
- 23 United Nation International Children Emergency Fund, "Situation Analysis of Pakistan,".
<https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/596/file/Situation%20Analysis%20of%20Children%20in%20Pakistan.pdf>
- 24 "Corporal Punishment of Children in Pakistan," *Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children*, 2020,13.

is not enough though to combat corporal punishment; that is why there is a dire need of a comprehensive policy prohibiting corporal punishment in educational institutions across the country. The 18th Constitutional Amendment authorizes all the provincial governments to legislate independently. In Gilgit Baltistan (GB), the government has made some progress in passing an Act titled: “The Gilgit Baltistan Prohibition of Corporal Punishment against Children Act, 2015”, and in that way GB became the first ‘region’ of Pakistan to legally ban corporal punishment on a provincial level (Gilgit-Baltistan is a region without enjoying the full status of a province. However political process to declare it a full province is on its way).

There is very limited qualitative literature available on corporal punishment in the context of Pakistan. The current qualitative study fills the research gaps by highlighting the local experiences, perceptions of the students, teachers, and parents in the context of Gilgit Baltistan where the corporal punishment Act has already been passed. The findings of the study may be useful for the development practitioners, governments and other relevant stakeholders for future interventions in the country on similar issue from different perspective and thus may contribute to the knowledge on the subject. These findings may be supportive for the child rights, and human right activities to advocate on cause. This study may be a point of departure for the future social scientists who may further explore on the very subject.

The article attempts to explore the situation of corporal punishment in public schools of Danyor, Gilgit Baltistan. It also tries to find out the perceptions of local community from a native lens. Furthermore, the study looks into the implementation and the level of understanding among students, teachers, and parents regarding the prohibition Act of 2015.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Discipline and Punishment

Corporal punishment in public schools of Danyor, GB, is perceived as one of the most effective tools of discipline and is used as such. The prevalence of corporal punishment is age and gender based. Physical punishment is used for male students, while verbal abuse is commonly administered on female students.

Students are punished for various misbehaviours ranging from failing in exams, roaming around in the corridors, making noise, incomplete homework, misbehaving with the teachers, attacking other children in the class, disobeying school rules, coming late to school and wearing an untidy uniform. The most common kinds of punishments were hitting with a stick or book, tapping on the head or at the back, and sometimes light slaps. Some male students reported that the most humiliating punishments are the traditional forms of punishment i.e. *murga* and *kanpakdi* (local terms used for staying in an uncomfortable position) which are sometimes practiced by teachers to discipline students.

The majority of the teachers prefer to use corporal punishment because their experience proves that it is the most effective disciplinary tool. They share a common belief that students are more obedient to those teachers who are strict as compared to those who are friendly in nature. Teachers narrate that friendly relation with students undermines their authority hence, it is important to set boundaries for students. One of the teachers said, "The biggest challenge for teachers is that students do not study without punishments. Sometimes we have to punish because we do not know other means to discipline them."²⁵

Some students also share the belief that punishment is good for their academic life because it encourages them to study and get good grades. One of the students said, "Whether

25 A teacher's interview.

teachers scold us or beat us, I think it is for our own benefit. We should not be reactive about punishments because they teach us how to behave in the class.”²⁶ Those students who were in favour of punishments internalized it by justifying that it gives them a reason to study and they stay focused during the lecture, but there is a huge difference between studying by motivation and studying in fear of punishment. The former has long lasting benefits while the later has short term benefits. One student added, “When we prepare a test in fear of teacher or punishment, we focus more on memorization rather than understanding the concepts. So, only relying on memorization is useless.”²⁷

Academic and Behavioural Issues

Corporal punishment is a cruel action that multiplies fear, confusion, tension, and violence among students.²⁸ It has various harmful consequences such as decreased self-confidence, increased stress, and inflexibility in daily matters which may result in nervousness and aggression.²⁹ The data have shown that it effects the teacher-student relationship; creates hatred for teachers, destroys students learning capabilities, causes psychological problems, affects the school learning environment, and creates aggressive and rebellious attitudes among students. One of the students while sharing his views said, “When a student is punished in front of everyone, that is the worst experience one can ever

26 A Student’s interview

27 A student’s interview.

28 Ogando Portela, Maria José and Kirrily Pells, “Corporal Punishment in Schools: Longitudinal Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam”, *Innocenti Discussion Paper, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research*, (2015): 48.

<http://repositorio.minedu.gob.pe/bitstream/handle/123456789/4414/Corporal%20Punishment%20in%20Schools%20Longitudinal%20Evidence%20from%20Ethiopia,%20India%20Peru%20and%20Viet%20Nam.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

29 Ali, *et. al.*, “Corporal Punishment,”.

have. Parents are blamed for not taking care of our hygiene. That negative attitude really shatters our confidence.”³⁰

Students are also mocked by other fellow students by calling them different names i.e. *jotoo* (local term used for short heighted kids) and *brotoo* (local term used for over weight kids) which really affect their self-confidence. One of the teachers said, “If we respect our students and make them feel empowered, they can easily bring out their hidden talents.”³¹ Humiliation, ridiculing, and bullying decrease the confidence and passion of students and that is why every individual should be respected.

It can lead to serious physical, emotional, and psychological problems for students. Physical and verbal abuse create fear and hatred among students towards their teachers. Fear and learning cannot go hand in hand because the learning environment should have a peaceful atmosphere.³² Due to punishments, students stay in fear with low self-esteem resulting in less class participation in public schools. Students are not appreciated to openly share their ideas during class. They have only two things to do during lectures: listen to the teacher and jot down the main points. On the contrary, there are very few teachers who appreciate class participation of students. Those teachers who adopt activity-based teaching, allow class participation, prefer positive disciplinary tools, and discourage punishments in school are most liked by students.

Students should be treated according to their psychology. While discussing diverse behavioural patterns of students, one of the teachers said, “There is a diversity of behaviors among students in every class. Some students are disciplined through advice while others need verbal abuse. Some are controlled through physical punishment while others need motivational lectures. There are some students

30 A student's interview.

31 A teacher's interview.

32 Rice, “The Attitude of Teachers towards Corporal Punishment,”.

who are beaten up by their parents on daily basis, so they only understand through punishments. It is important to use their own language.”³³

There are minimum chances of developing good relation between teachers and students where corporal punishment is exercised.³⁴ When students are punished for petty things, they feel insulted, become more rebellious, and lose motivation. Corporal punishment weakens the relationship between students and teachers, and it decreases the motivation of students towards learning.³⁵

Parents' Negligence

Parents have a pivotal role in the personality development and holistic growth of their children. According to teachers, the majority of parents in public schools do not even know in which class their children are enrolled. Parents seldom visit the school to ask about their children's performance. Research has also found out that very few parents stay in contact with teachers to remain aware of their children's performance.³⁶ When parents are invited to “Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM)”, only a few parents ensure their presence. So, it is very hard for teachers to maintain coordination with parents regarding their children's performance.

While commenting on parent's role, one of the teachers said, “Teaching process is based on three main pillars: students, teachers, and parents. In public schools, teachers are working hard and are aware of their responsibilities, but parents' limited interest, makes this process challenging for teachers.”³⁷ Students also consented that their parents do

33 A teacher's interview.

34 Morrell Robert, "Corporal Punishment in South African Schools: A Neglected Explanation for its Persistence," *South African Journal of Education* 21, no. 4 (2001): 292-299.

35 Gudyanga, Mbengo and Wadesango, "Corporal Punishment in Schools,".

36 Bibi, *et. al.*, "The Nature and Impact of Teacher Stress in the Private Schools of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan,".

37 A teacher's interview.

not bother to ask them about their studies because, in public schools, parents are not paying any fee.

Taking it as a disciplinary tool at home as well, parents favour physical punishment and ignore its harmful effects on their children's personalities.³⁸ Most parents support corporal punishment in public schools of Danyor. They think that teachers are just like father/mother for students. One of the parents said, "If a teacher gives punishment that shows the teacher's concern for students. Punishments in schools make our children more competent and focused on studies."³⁹ However, a few parents are aware of the deadly effects of physical punishment and suggest its prohibition.

In Pakistan, physical punishment has cultural and social acceptance and is considered the best child rearing practice. It is considered the easiest technique to make children disciplined by parents, care-takers, and teachers.⁴⁰ The concepts of *Talim* (education) and *Tarbiyat* (upbringing) used in the local cultural context are relevant here. *Talim* is perceived as the responsibility of the teacher while *tarbiyat* is thought liability by both teachers and parents. Teachers report that due to parent's limited interest, both education and upbringing become teachers' responsibility in public schools. As a result, teachers are compelled to use punishment as a disciplinary tool.

Prohibition of Corporal Punishment

Majority of the students and teachers at public schools of Danyor are aware of the GB Act banning corporal punishment because the local government notified all the public schools to strictly follow it. According to students,

38 Shah, "Punishing Children,"
https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=26_07_2017_009_001

39 A teacher's interview.

40 Hafiz Hasnat Ahmad, "Child Punishment in Households and Schools; A Case Study of Village Maingeri, Narowal," (Islamabad: Unpublished Masters thesis, Department of Anthropology, Quaid e Azam University, Islamabad, 2009), 84.

there is a noticeable decrease in practicing corporal punishment after the Act. Teachers are now more cautious because they are accountable to their head teachers.

The Foucauldian concept of biopower refers to the various disciplinary ways through which a state tries to create specific subjects (citizens).⁴¹ Drawing upon the concept of biopower in the current study, the local government uses its power through the education department to build a narrative in schools, that physical, verbal, or emotional abuse experienced by children in schools during corporal punishment is, violation of human rights and such coercion and abuse may have harmful effects on the physical and mental health of students.⁴²

While commenting on the prevalence of corporal punishment, the head teacher said, "Physical punishment has now come down to be practiced by 1 (one) percent of the teachers in public schools after the prohibition. Now, if a student is punished, others make videos and put up a complain to the concerned departments. Teachers are learning to use modern teaching methods. Earlier, there was a system of "teacher-centered teaching", which is no more there. Now teachers prefer opting for "student-centered teaching techniques" because students' holistic growth is now a priority."⁴³

It was interesting to know that students are satisfied with the positive change in public schools in terms of resources, academics, and disciplinary matters. Public schools are updated with competent teachers where the modern style of teaching is adopted to create a greater impact. Besides, the government is providing free of cost text books to encourage education for all. One of the students said, "Now public schools come in competition with private schools. People

41 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Vol. 1, 1st ed, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

42 El Ouardani, "Care or Neglect?: Corporal Discipline Reform in a Rural Moroccan Classroom,".

43 A teacher's interview.

think that students have financial issues, resulting in preference for enrollment in government schools. But I have no financial issue; still I prefer public schools.”⁴⁴

During research, a view was reported by some teachers, that prohibition laws were entirely western and unapplicable to the local cultural contexts. One of the teachers said, “We are blindly following laws, applicable only in western countries. Our context and moral values are quite different. Our children listen only when we scold or punish them badly.”⁴⁵ On the other hand, some teachers appreciated the prohibition Act and thought that such laws are helpful in creating a better learning environment.

Corporal punishment rarely transforms the negative attitude of students and has no academic importance.⁴⁶ Most of the students are aware of the negative physical and psychological effects of corporal punishment and that is why they demand its eradication. Students also emphasize the importance to ban the traditional punishments, such as *murga* and *kanpakdi*. The most humiliating punishment is forcing students to stay in an uncomfortable position.⁴⁷

Great teachers are those who are caring, show respect, and create a good communication channel with their students. Those who prefer positive disciplinary practices, show interest in the holistic development of students, and those who are not rigid with their rules, are seen to be most desirable teachers.⁴⁸ Nowadays more teachers embrace the belief that the promotion of discipline through punishment and abuse creates a fearful environment. Even more, they revealed how experiencing punishment in childhood totally ruined their confidence. As one of the teachers said, “I was very scared of my teachers because they used to punish us

44 A student’s interview.

45 A teacher’s interview.

46 Robert, “Corporal Punishment in South African Schools,”.

47 Ogando, José and Kirrily Pells, “Corporal Punishment in Schools,”.

48 Rice, “The Attitude of Teachers Towards Corporal Punishment,”.

a lot. But now I try to create such a learning environment in my class where students should feel safe and confident.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The research conducted on experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding corporal punishment in public schools of Danyor, reveal that corporal punishment is still prevalent here despite its prohibition. However, there is a noticeable decrease in practicing corporal punishment in public schools after the prohibition Act by the GB government. There were signs of change and observed decrease in the beliefs and practices concerning corporal punishment in schools.

It is noteworthy that teachers and students are well aware of the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools. Male students suffer from physical punishment while female students have to face verbal abuse. However, according to students, emotional and verbal abuse is more painful and disheartening as compared to physical punishment because it affects their personalities directly.

Due to corporal punishment, students may develop aggressive behaviors, rebellious attitudes, inflexibility, hatred and inferiority complex. Teachers think that one of the reasons for the prevalence of corporal punishment in public schools, is parent's limited interest in educational affairs of their children. So, both education and upbringing become the responsibility of teachers which results in workload.

The key limitation of the study is that responses quoted in the article are opinions, local experiences, perceptions of the students, teachers, and parents within a specific context, and hence cannot be generalized upon a larger population. We would suggest further research on policy and implementation on corporal punishment in different parts of Pakistan at a wider level as future research suggestion for this emerging topic.

49 A teacher's interview.

The insights presented here have policy implications. There is urgent need to regulate government policies and introduce students' friendly rules in schools to reduce the practice of corporal punishment. It is suggested that teachers should be trained on positive disciplinary tools, classroom management, child psychology and other modern methods of treating students. Advocacy, legislative and educational reforms are need of the time to create awareness about the damages caused by corporal punishment among parents, teachers and children.