

### Corporal punishment in schools: Global status and remedial measures

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#### Abstract

Corporal punishment in schools is a global problem but with increasing awareness about its harmful effects many countries have banned the corporal punishment in schools. In India this problem was quite prevalent and accepted by the society as it was considered beneficial for the good education of children and still many people are in favor of it. Now with the media coming in and highlighting the serious problems of corporal punishment, demands have come to ban it totally. But mere banning and making rules & laws does not completely solve the problem. In this paper this problem of corporal punishment has been defined, its prevalence mapped and ill effects of corporal punishment highlighted. Current status of laws and regulations and their utility in India and various parts of the world has been discussed. Measures have been suggested to curb and eradicate the problem of corporal punishment in educational institutions. *Int J Eth Trauma Victimology* 2015; 1(2):59-61.

**Keywords:** Corporal punishment, punishment in schools, discipline, verbal punishments.

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#### Introduction

Corporal punishment is defined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as “Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light” (1).

Various methods are used to punish the children. Mostly it is slapping on the face or caning on the palms of the hands. It also involves asking students to stand on the benches or against the wall and ordering them to sit or bend in awkward positions. Sometimes teachers become more aggressive and use fists, kicks and other means resulting in injuries to the students (2). Pinching and spanking are also not uncommon (3). Paddles, yardsticks and belts have also been used to create pain and fear (4). Sometimes these punishments get so severe that resultant injuries may cause the death of the students (5). Usually small children are more prone to death as they are not able to defend themselves properly from such punishments (6).

It is not only physical punishment but verbal humiliation also causes a loss of self-respect of children which changes the perception of learning process of the children (7). Verbal punishments cause mental hurt which is usually caused by ridiculing, belittling, scaring, threatening and denigrating (8).

Usually corporal punishment is inflicted in the classrooms in front of other students but it is also inflicted in the principal's office (3). It is not uncommon to reprimand the students during the morning prayers in the open grounds.

Sometimes students become so much traumatized and hurt that they commit suicide and after such incidents usually there is a lot of discussions on the TV but the memories are short lived and again the discussion will start with a new incidence (9). Usually the students who commit suicide have history of frequent and longstanding abuse by teachers as was in the case of a Japanese student (10). These reports are not isolated to India or Japan but has been reported from other parts of the world and one such report from Pakistan says that seven children committed suicide in a few months in Peshawar from the fear of corporal punishment (11).

Aim of the corporal punishment is to immediately stop the offence and set an example for others so that offence is not repeated in the future (4). It is argued that with this process students can immediately return to the learning process after getting punishment (3).

Corporal punishment also leads to psychological damage (7). Long term effects of corporal punishment has also been reported like low test scores rather than improvement in academic achievements(12) . Violent behavior to spouse and increased violent behavior in the society has also been observed as the after effects of corporal punishment (7).

In a study done in 2007 by the Government of India about 65% of children were shown to have been exposed to corporal punishment in India (13). In India although boys and girls both are involved in cases of corporal punishment yet boys are involved 8% more than girls (8). Victims of corporal punishment are mostly boys around the world and same is true in USA and they number about 80% (12).

In the nineteenth century corporal punishment was prevalent in ABC schools when punishment was given to the students for not speaking the language loudly and at that time it was also prevalent almost all over the world (14). Sweden was the first country to ban corporal punishment in schools in 1979 and since then 100 countries have banned corporal punishment in schools (15).

In 1867 New Jersey was the first state in US to ban corporal punishment which is still practiced in 19 states of USA and corporal punishment is still legal in these 19 states (3). In USA black students were more prone to corporal punishment(16). Students with disabilities have higher rate of infliction of corporal punishment in USA as compared to student without disabilities(16).

In India, Delhi court was the first court in India to ban corporal punishment in schools considering that in this child dignity is lowered. Court remarked that even there were laws where animals cannot be beaten then why small children should not be spared from corporal punishment. Children are national resource and they should be cared with tenderness(17).

National commission for protection of child rights has issued guidelines that in schools there should be forums where children and parents can raise issue of corporal punishment, even if, minor. This approach may help in solving the problem (7).

The reasons for continuing practice of corporal punishments in schools includes lack of awareness in the teachers about the laws of the land and implications of corporal punishment in the future life of the students (18) It is also a manifestation of frustration of the teachers (8). Teachers also believe that suspending a student instead of corporal punishment means giving students vacation to enjoy (16).

Some schools in USA allow the parents to opt out from corporal punishment for their children and some schools even allow students to opt out from corporal punishment for detention or suspension (3). Alternative behavior management (19) and positive discipline supports(4) are measures to be adopted to tackle the problems of discipline in schools.

Advocates of banning of corporal punishment point out that it damages the trust between learners and teachers (16). Right to Education Act 2010 prohibits corporal punishment and mental harassment of students (20).

## Conclusions

Amnesty international has beautifully highlighted the rights of students through an equation " $hre = i+u+r^A$ " Human rights education is about *i* and *u* and our ability to recognize and respect each other's rights and responsibilities."(21). Now there are rules and guidelines to stop the corporal punishment in schools but still it is continuing in schools. There is need to make the management of schools, teachers and students aware that it is illegal now to resort to corporal punishment for the mistakes done by the students. Parents can also encourage their wards to raise a voice against corporal punishment. It is very important that parents maintain always an open line of communication with their children about happenings in class and school and should not dismiss the small problems communicated by their wards as if not taken care of children will stop communicating with parents about this matter and will suffer

alone and this may lead later on to a bigger problem like suicide or loss of interest in studies. There should be effective mechanisms in schools about reporting of cases of corporal punishment and to take care of complaints of students about corporal punishment even though these complaints may be anonymous. Simultaneously police officials should be made aware and trained to handle cases of corporal punishment in schools. Media should also play a positive role in disseminating knowledge to concerned stake holders about the developments in rules and laws about corporal punishment instead of making hue and cry only after serious happenings in schools.

**Conflict of interest:** none

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