

Feelings of Parents on the Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *This is part of a broad study that sought to find out views of parents in Zimbabwe on the use of corporal punishment in schools. This paper looks at feelings of parents on the policy that bars the use of corporal punishment in schools. The study used case study as a research design. The study used questionnaires in the collection of data. The research participants consisted of two hundred and fifty parents who were randomly selected when they were attending a consultation days at selected schools in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe. The study found out that teachers were still using corporal punishment in classes as way of enforcing discipline and making sure pupils abide by accepted behaviour. The teachers had ignored the government directive that reserved the use of corporal punishment to the school head or any other teacher delegated by the head. The research also found out that the parents thought corporal punishment was an effective way of disciplining children in schools but needed to be used in moderation. Most of the parents were not aware of the government policy that forbade the use of corporal punishment in schools. The study recommends that the government makes an effort to educate citizens on new policies that will have been made so that they fully implemented. There is need for teachers to fully implement government policies. Teachers are also urged to use child friendly methods of making children change unbecoming behaviour to socially accepted behaviours. The study recommends that teachers use methods like guidance and counselling, modelling and positive reinforcement in effecting discipline and behaviour change in pupils.*

Keywords: corporal punishment, perceptions, policy, discipline and behaviour

1. Introduction

The use of corporal punishment has been subject of discussion since time immemorial. From the time the bible was written people aired their views as to whether it was correct to use corporal punishment or not. Proverbs 22 verse 6 says *Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children*". This shows that the bible is in support of the use of corporal punishment for the purpose of moulding a child's behaviour. Present trends however have gone against the use of corporal punishment seeing it as a dehumanising way of correcting a child's behaviour. This research sought to find out the feelings of parents on the use of corporal punishment in schools.

2. Research Question

What are the feelings of parents on the use of corporal punishment in schools in Zimbabwe.

3. Literature Review

Corporal punishment - definition and background

There are many definitions for corporal punishment. Donnelly and Strauss (2005) say that corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury for the purpose of controlling or correcting a child's behaviour. Benator (2001) defines corporal punishment as the infliction of physical pain upon the occurrence of perceived misbehaviour. Furthermore corporal punishment is defined under human rights law as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain and discomfort (corporal punishment, 2011). These definitions show that there is use of physical force to cause pain in corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is usually inflicted through canning, slapping, swatting and spanking. Corpun (2007) says that

corporal punishment has been present since early civilization of Greece, Rome, Israel and Egypt in Africa. In the Bible Proverbs 13:24 says He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly. The stick was the most used form of administering corporal punishment. There is an old saying which is frequently quoted which goes, "spare the rod and spoil the child."

Benator (2005) says that theories of corporal punishment can be described as utilitarian and retributive. The utilitarian theories of punishment recognize that punishment has consequences for the offender and society upholds that the total good produced by the punishment should exceed the evil. It seeks to punish the offender and to discourage future wrongdoing. Retributive theories argue that punishment is justified if it is deserved. It is not concerned about the consequences but the means of punishment which should prevent the offender and other people from committing similar acts. This then shows that the theories of corporal punishment focus on being retributive, preventive, reformative and deterrent on the premise that an offence has been committed which one has to be punished for.

Most of the studies done to date show that spanking increases aggressive behaviour especially towards other people (Jenny, 2009). However many regard corporal punishment positively as a customary and necessary technique of child rearing. Corporal punishment in schools can thus be seen as serving a useful educational purpose. According to Corpun (2007), the writings of John Locke influenced Polish legislators to call for the plan of corporal punishment in Polish schools in 1783. The convention on the rights of the child which was adopted by the UN in 1989 forbids physical abuse of children by parents or caregivers. The convention has been ratified by all UN members except USA and Somalia. By the early 21st Century more than 100 countries had abandoned corporal punishment in schools (Corporal punishment, 2011). Corporal punishment has thus

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been outlawed in many countries of Western Europe, China, Japan New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Thailand and Zimbabwe. This view was supported by the International Convention on the rights of children (UN Children's Fund, 1999).

There is a growing worldwide movement to end legal approval of corporal punishment in schools. As a result the following countries have recently banned corporal punishment by legislation or judicial decision. These are New Zealand, South Africa, Namibia, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji and Thailand. (Repeal 43 Committee). In Eastern Caribbean, corporal punishment in schools was socially and legally accepted until UNICEF piloted training for teachers in Barbados in behaviour management techniques which aimed at giving alternative approaches to teachers and eventually proved successful. (UNICEF, 2009). In Mauritania, corporal punishment was broadly practiced in Koranic schools, secular primary schools and within families. However efforts to abolish corporal punishment are being effected after UNICEF in 2009 presented research findings to the president of the Imam's Network Hademine Onid Saleck. There is now a widespread understanding that corporal punishment is unlawful child abuse and harmful. The eradication of corporal punishment in India is proving difficult. India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and has many policies that ban corporal punishment in schools but these seem out of kilter with everyday realities. The government of India commissioned research that included more than 3000 children aged from 5-18 asking about physical abuse by teachers. In all age groups 65% reported being beaten at school. (The Guardian May 2015)

In the United States of America many states have banned corporal punishment in public schools, while several others including Texas, allow the practice but give parents the opportunity to opt out. In Texas corporal punishment in public schools is considered lawful unless a parent or legal guardian has refused to give permission with a signed written statement to the school board. (State Laws, 2015). Because the Supreme court of Canada decided in 2004 that school teachers can no longer use section 43 as a defence to corporal punishment of students such punishment is now illegal throughout Canada. (Repeal 43 committee, 2015). In Britain corporal punishment in state schools was banned in 1986 and in all schools in 1998. The 1998 amendment to the UK Education act expressly allows teachers to use reasonable force to restrain students from committing an offence, causing personal injury or damage to property, or engaging in behaviour prejudicial to good order and discipline. All European countries have banned corporal punishment in schools. In Austria it was banned as long ago as 1870. According to Farrell (2015) British style formal caning for male students only is fully lawful as a punishment in Singapore schools and is strongly supported by the government. Now that school corporal punishment has been completely abolished in the UK and most of its other former outposts, Singapore is probably the country where English school caning traditions are still most faithfully upheld. (Repeal 43 Committee, 2015)

Studies done by Zindi in 1997 found out that corporal punishment is still a popular method of behavioural correction in Zimbabwe in spite of calls to be cautious in its use in schools. Similarly, Peters (1980) argues that of all the forms of punishment in schools, the cane would be effective when used soon after the misbehaviour so that students can associate the punishment and appreciate why the act is forbidden. Spencer and Spencer (2001) maintain that corporal punishment is an integral part of the process through which schools achieve the fundamental objective they were established for, including the developing and moulding of a loyal and productive future citizen of Zimbabwe.

Feelings of parents on the use of corporal punishment.

There are differing perspectives on the use of corporal punishment. Some impugners of corporal punishment argue that it turns the classroom into a battleground where the teacher finds himself/herself in the position of attacking and terrorizing the innocent, powerless and defenceless students. According to Freire (1990), such a situation is dehumanizing to both the student and the teacher where the teacher is the oppressor and the student is the oppressed. This scenario is against one that should normally exist in a conducive learning environment where the teacher facilitates learning and can be a confidante to the learners.

Beatings and their forms of disciplinary action are still administered legally or covertly in most countries, Zimbabwe included. Bob (1978) noted that a classroom can be the most unruly and chaotic place despite the wooden ruler and its frequent use. Within the society, according to Kubatana.Net (2015), teachers, parents and guardians generally believe that corporal punishment is necessary as a disciplinary measure. Adults therefore regard corporal punishment as lacking any consequences besides its immediate disciplinary purpose of making the child obedient. Traditionally there has been a perception that corporal punishment stops a child from misbehaving.

Other theorists are of the opinion that adults must be made aware that physically beating children or administering any other forms of corporal punishment has negative impacts for children. There are immediate short term effects associated with effecting corporal punishment which includes regression, negative attitude towards school, teacher and parents, above all the child can be hurt and have visible bruises. The long term effects include increase in chances of worse behaviour, impaired learning and delinquency, depression, child abuse and wife or husband beating (Kubatana.net 2015). To some extent however, there is a general feeling that the use of light corporal punishment is a necessary disciplinary measure. There are feelings that this form of restraint is an immediate effective means of showing a child the right way to behave. Some educators, according to Matope and Mugodzwa (2011), consider that corporal punishment results in well behaved and disciplined students and any attempt to ban it will put the authority of the teacher in jeopardy. However questions are raised on the extent of disciplining the child, visible harm caused by the act and the objects used to effect the punishment.

4. Methodology

This study employed a case study research design. This research method was used as the researchers felt it was the most ideal for the study. Bryman (2004) states that a case study is a type of observational information collection method in which an individual or group of people is studied in depth so as to recognise behavioural, emotional and cognitive virtues that are generally correct. Case study relates to the gathering and presentation of full information about a certain respondent or small group often including the details of participants. Emphasis according to Nkomo (2007) is placed on examination and description of the issue being looked at. A case study looks at the interaction of all variables so as to offer absolute understanding of the situation. Nkomo (2007) puts it that there is an in-depth explanation of the issue under evaluation, the conditions under which it is used, the kind of people included in it and the nature of the area in which it is situated.

The research instruments were questionnaires. Questionnaires were convenient because it is possible for the research participant to analyse the subject and respond honestly and independently without the interference of the researcher. Tuckman (1972) supports the use of questionnaire saying it solicits information or data from inside a person's head and makes it possible to measure what a person knows, likes, dislikes and thinks.

The research used probability sampling technique of random sampling where there was a possibility of each person in the population being selected. The sample consisted of two hundred and fifty parents from five randomly selected schools in Goromonzi district who were attending consultation days. The researchers sourced for information on when the randomly selected schools held their consultation days. The researchers then visited the schools on the consultation days to distribute the questionnaires. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysis techniques.

5. Results

Demographic Data

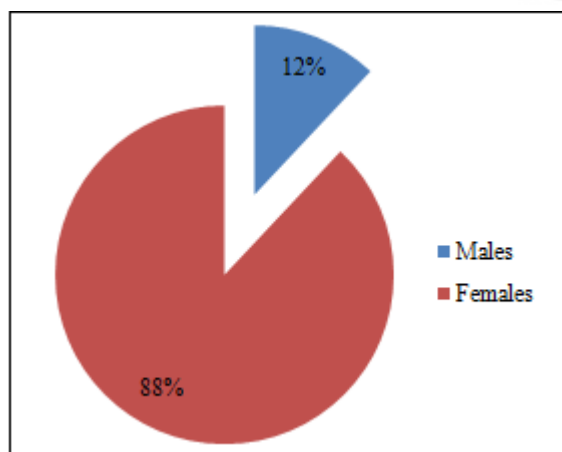


Figure 1: Respondents by sex

The pie chart above shows that 12% of the respondents were males and 88% were females. This shows that many females in Sally Mugabe Heights are stay at home mothers. They were available at home throughout the whole week when the researcher was collecting data.

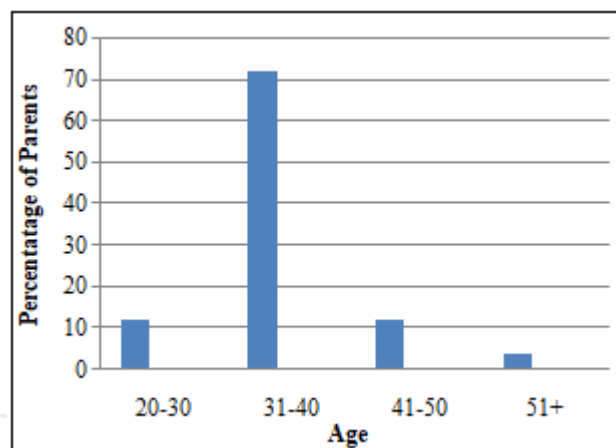


Figure 2: Respondents by age

The presentation above shows that 12% of the respondents are between ages 20-30, 72% are between the ages 31-40, 12% are between the ages 41-50 and 4% are over 50 years..

Table 1: Respondents according to academic qualifications, N=250

Qualification	Grade 7	ZJC	'O' Level	'A' Level	Other	Total
No. of Parents	20	70	130	30	0	50
Percentage	8	28	52	12	0	100

The table shows that 8% of the respondents went up to grade 7, 28% attained ZJC, 52% have 'O' Level and 12% have 'A' Level. The presentation shows that the majority of the parents went up to 'O' Level. There are however some who only did primary education. Some went to form 2 and hold the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate. The majority went up to 'O' Level and very few had 'A' Level.

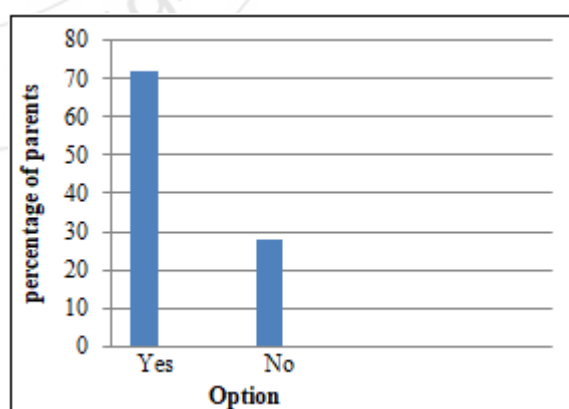


Figure 3: Effectiveness of corporal punishment

The diagram above shows that 72% of the parents thought corporal punishment was an effective method of disciplining children and 28% thought it was not effective in disciplining children.

Below are excerpts from the interviews carried out and what the respondents said on the use corporal punishment in schools.

Excerpt 1

It must be used moderately for the purposes of disciplining a child but not to be done in a harsh way. Children must understand that it is being used so as to correct their misbehaviour and not that the teacher hates the child.

Excerpt 2

I think it is okay provided kids understand why it is effected on them. They have to understand the reason why it is being used.

Excerpt 3

Use as a last option. The teacher should have tried other options of disciplining the child and only when they have failed should the teacher use it.

Excerpt 4

It is better to train a child than punish a man later in life. Proverbs 22 vs 6 .Train up a child...."Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children"

It emerged that even those who thought corporal punishment should be used felt it should be used in moderation. Most of the responses indicated that it should be used rarely or not very often or as a last resort. Some of the parents wrote that it was good as long as the child understood why they were being beaten. This was echoed by another parent who wrote that one should talk to the child first before beating them. Some of the parents indicated that if used regularly it loses its meaning.

6. Discussion

The results from this study showed that most parents felt corporal punishment should be used. These results are similar to those found by Gomba (2015). Respondents who were for the use of corporal punishment felt it produced good results in the child's discipline. This is in line with the utilitarian theory of punishment which recognises that punishment has consequences for the offender and society upholds that the total good produced by the punishment should exceed the evil (Benator, 2005). It recognises that corporal punishment has some ill effects but its immediate results benefit the child in the long run. One parent wrote that *"It is better to train a child than punish a man later in life....Proverbs 22 vs 6.....those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children."* Spencer and Spencer (2001) say that corporal punishment is an integral part of the process through which schools achieve the fundamental objective they were established for including the developing and moulding of a loyal and productive future citizen of Zimbabwe. 72% of the parents in this study felt that corporal punishment was an effective method of disciplining children. Shumba, Ndofirepi and Musengi (2012) say that advocates of corporal punishment consider it a necessary and effective way of disciplining children as it produces immediate results. This is also supported by Chemhuru (2010) who says corporal punishment is seen as a deterrent, reformative and retributive mechanism with the aim of

bringing positive behaviour in schools and society. Matope and Mugodzwa (2011) say that teachers are regarded as parents in schools and therefore act in loco parentis within the school and use corporal punishment.

However parents in this study indicated that it should be used in moderation. This view is similar to what is posited by Matope and Mugodzwa (2011) who say light corporal punishment is a necessary disciplinary measure. Some parents indicated that the child must be made to understand why corporal punishment was being used on them. Peters (1980) says the cane would be effective when used soon after the misbehaviour so that the students can associate the punishment and appreciate why the act committed is forbidden. The child need to actually understand the reason why corporal punishment is being applied. According to Benator (2005) retributive theorists argue that punishment is justified if it is deserved. The retributive theory is not concerned about the consequences but the means of the punishment which should prevent other people from committing similar acts. 28% of the parents felt that corporal punishment was an ineffective method of disciplining children. Their feelings are in line with the views of Lansford, Tapanya and Oburu (2011) who say that there is little evidence that corporal punishment results in better behaviour except inducing immediate compliance.

There are some parents however who felt that corporal punishment should not be used at all. One parent wrote that corporal punishment should not be used as it hurt children physically and mentally. Gudyanga (2014) says that corporal punishment creates enmity between the teacher and student and may in turn result in detachment and resentment towards the teacher by the pupil. This resentment may affect the emotional development of the student. According to Kubatana.net (2015) there are immediate short term effects associated with effecting corporal punishment which include regression, negative attitude towards school and above all the child can be hurt and have visible bruises. Jenny (2009) says most studies show that spanking increases aggressive behaviour. In applying corporal punishment the teacher will be modelling to the child that when one has problems with someone the problem can be solved using force. The results of this study are similar to those found by Kimengi and Mwai (2014). They found that 78% of parents agreed that teachers should use corporal punishment to modify deviant behaviour and 63% of parents agreed that teachers should be allowed to use corporal punishment with discretion. The difference between this study and the one by Kimengi and Mwai (2014) is that this study focused on a primary institution and their study focused on pre primary institutions.

7. Conclusions

This research study made the following conclusions:

- Teachers were still using corporal punishment in classes though the Government had put it as a policy that it had banned its use in schools.
- Most of the parents still believed that corporal punishment was necessary for the purposes of modifying their children's behaviour.

- Parents felt it was ideal for the child to understand why corporal punishment was being applied so that the child does not repeat the unwanted behaviour.
- Parents were not quite cognisant of the long term negative effects of corporal punishment. They were only concerned on the immediate results.

8. Recommendations

The research study made the following recommendations:

- The government should make an effort to educate its citizens on the various policies it will be making. This helps in co-opting the citizens to assist in implementing the various policies it will be making.
- Teachers should make every effort to implement Government policies and to deliberately ignore them or act in contravention to them.
- Parents need to need to embrace recent trends in disciplining children and actually assist the Government in implementing modern trends in education.

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