

Views and controversies on physical punishments in education

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Abstract

Being a review of a previous work, the present article attempts to demonstrate the extent to which a range of educators express their views on physical punishments, a practice that is increasingly contested and forbidden by many education stakeholders since the previous decades. Through analysis of different declarations and findings from different researchers, the paper reveals and points to the views of parents and teachers to the use of physical punishments, and their vehement opposition to national laws forbidding it. Findings presented in this article indicate that children have also supported the use of physical punishments. The aim of this article is to find out whether Rwandan education stakeholders share or not the same views as corrective measures in home and schools.

Key words: Physical punishment, education stakeholders, punishment regulations (codes)

Introduction

There are divergent views on the use of physical punishment. These views seem to be rooted in the respective institutional philosophies, level of civilization and cultural backgrounds. On the issue of physical punishment, philosophers of humanism base on both a human and a humane approach to educational problems. They claim that the nature of the child and its growing mind should not be suppressed by cruel school punishment and rigid methods of institution (Hans, 1986).

Humanism is a philosophy which emphasizes its deal on a reasonable balance in life, vivid interest in all sides of life, freedom from religiosity, responsiveness to all passions. It holds that man is the center and the measure of all activities. Humanists believe in rendering service for the greater good of all humanity according to the demands of reason and democracy. They believe that man is the maker and master of his own destiny; that man's happiness lies in this World. They stress the achievement of human happiness. To humanists, man should be made free in this World to progress culturally, economically, and ethically (Chaube, 1994). To the understanding of the author, this means that punishing a child for his/her welfare is useless because, the child, as a human being, may himself/herself decide on his/her own destiny. Therefore his/her happiness does not depend on any other guidelines since he/she is made to be free. So, educators should not force the reason in the place of the child by using punishment. The author's objection to humanists is that, we cannot deny the intervention of educators who guide every individual in his/her everyday life. Humanists forget that to be a human, man needs guidance, otherwise the society loses its meaning and values. Educational principles explain how too much freedom leads to indiscipline and chaos in homes, in schools and may even affect the welfare of the community.

From a cultural perspective, conservative people, especially in Africa, want their children to observe and keep the tradition so as to inherit and perpetuate the culture. To strengthen the practice, Africans rely on the use of physical punishment to any child who is seen misbehaving. On the other hand, (Docking, 1980) reports that some

decades ago, Western educationists concluded that the use of physical punishment in homes and schools was a barbaric relic of a bygone age which is incompatible with the present day of the humanitarian ethics; that it was an archaic method for a country cherishing progress, a tit for tat action used by people with a lower level of moral control; that children should be given the freedom to do what they want. If they go against the rules, other forms of punishment such as detention should be administered. To the author's view, saying that punishing physically is a sign of a lower level of moral control does not mean that westerners' children who are not physically punished behave in an expected manner. Literature and media report that because of too much freedom, westerners' children commit crime by shooting parents, teachers and peers. To the author, this is not what parents, teachers and westerners' leaders expect from children.

Psychologically, physical punishment may lead to emotion, anger, stress, sadness, sentiment and even a strong depression in the child. In this respect, psychologists think that all forms of punishment, caning inclusive have different outcomes. To psychologists, children should be counseled and helped to overcome the unwanted behavior rather than resorting to the cane. Human rights defenders emphasize the rights of children. In their working strategies, they condemn publically any harmful action against the child. Then human rights activists stress that corporal punishment is a torture. Therefore, as human rights defenders, they equate physical punishment to domestic violence. From many observations of the misuse, and the negative impact of the punishment in many countries, the United Nations, through Conventions and Declarations campaign for the protection of the child and the banning of corporal punishment in schools. UNESCO (2001) pointed out that caning has been banned in many countries because it was cruel, inhumane and degrading punishment. These declarations should be genuinely supported because some punishment users, driven by anger, can even kill children for misbehavior, which is cruel. When the punishment becomes cruel and degrading, then it becomes a physical abuse rather than a physical or corporal punishment. Cohen (1997) points out some punishments that must be avoided, namely: caning, strapping, striking, or shaking against which teachers are warned.

However, according to the social learning theory which was formulated by (Bandura, 1973) children learn behaviors through trial and error conditioning and through vicarious learning; that children also learn by observing the behaviors of others through positive and negative consequences that those behaviours bring. In relation to the use of physical punishment, children make mistakes when they try to learn; adults' reactions to these mistakes vary. Some educators punish physically, others emotionally.

Through the Bible (Solomon Proverbs, Chapters 13: 22 and 29), we learn that parents are given the mandate to physically punish their children. But this mandate and the parents' authority on children are being removed by external forces claiming being children's rights defenders. At school and in class, the teacher is given the authority by the community and the State to protect and guide children in all ways. He plays the role of the parents and has a national mandate. Therefore, he must make sure that children respond positively to the community's expectations because, Education is a community's business. However, teachers who use physical punishment seem

not to be supported although they use it to safeguard children for a better future. Sometimes, children do not easily see the danger facing them in the short or long term when they do wrong. The role of the parents, teachers, and other care givers is to help them use physical punishment so that children easily and quickly accommodate with community's wishes. In his research findings, Dalya (2004) revealed that between 75 to 95% of people believe that it is good to physically punish children so as to make them behave properly.

The purpose of this paper is to reveal that physical punishment is still recognized by some education stakeholders despite the negativity associated with it. This article shows that parents, teachers and even some leaders support the use of the punishment.

Meaning of physical punishment

Physical punishment has been defined as a deliberate infliction of pain intended to correct or punish. It is synonymous with corporal punishment, rooting respectively from Latin and Greek in the sense that both affect the body. Physical punishment includes beating, flagellation, hitting, hurting, kicking, paddling, pinching, punching, shaking, slapping, smacking, spanking, strapping, striking, whipping and alike to be included in the account of physical punishment.

To Beth (1994) physical punishment is a penalty for misbehavior with the intention of shaming a child. Other scholars like Donnelly and Murray (2005) have concluded that physical punishment is the use of force with the intention of leading a child to experience pain, but not injury for the purpose of correcting or controlling the child's behaviour. In their study, these researchers differentiated physical abuse from physical punishment in the sense that hitting a child with an object (belt, wooden paddle, etc) is a physical abuse rather than physical punishment. A punishment that causes pain without the intention of making the child suffer or causing injuries is a physical punishment. This means that we have to distinguish physical punishment from physical abuse. Physical punishment is allowed in Education but physical abuse is prohibited. Some education stakeholders tend to make confusion between the two corrective actions.

Government punishment regulations

Because of these controversies around corrective measures, educators and politicians had to find compromise in regulating them by establishing governmental codes. For example, the US, the UK, Kenya and Uganda have all enacted codes against physical punishment. In the US, the Texas Penal Code allows the use of force, but not deadly force, against a child younger than 18 years. Use of force is justified if the actor is the child's parent or a step-parent or is acting in 'Loco Parentis' to the child (e.g. a teacher, a social assistant, etc) and to the degree the actor, reasonably believes that force is necessary to discipline the child to safeguard or promote his/her welfare, he/she is justified by the Law. The US Criminal Code justifies force used against a minor, and to the extent that a parent, guardian, or other responsible reasonably believes, for the general care and welfare of a minor, it is necessary to

prevent or punish such a minor's misconduct. This force should, however not be deadly (Donnelly & Murray, 2005). The UK as a whole, agreed with the 1948 British Act of Education Reform as a policy of "Loco Parentis" in which all teachers were to assume the role of the parents once a child was in the school territory.

It ought to be noted that prohibition of the punishment is being revised by many social groups in the UK because of the chaos that are being experienced in many families and schools. It has been reported in the 2000 smacking paper published in the UK that a new attempt was made to clarify and improve the Law on the punishment of the children in Scotland. The Law stated that parents should have the right to smack their children in disciplining them. This position was supported by the majority of people in Scotland. People in this country wanted to amend the Law protecting children from physical punishment that is harsh, degrading and inappropriate in a descent society. This highlights what (Eremu, 2004) has reported that in Britain, an alliance of lawyers, childcare professionals and politicians joined forces to condemn as unworkable, plans to jail parents who administer anything stronger than a light smack to their children.

In Kenya, the Law allows the use of physical punishment on students. In 1999, (Human Rights Watch, 1999) observed that caning was the only form of corporal punishment permitted by the Kenyan Ministry of Education. Here, every class room teacher has the authority and independence to cane a student. The Kenyan Law allows that an offender may be given at least six strokes in the presence of the Head teacher; boys are hit on the buttocks and the backside while girls are hit on the palm and the backside of the hand. The Ugandan Constitution of 1995 stipulates that the Ugandan child should have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Use of physical punishment

As it is formulated in the introduction, the practice of physical punishment is related to levels of civilization, culture and the philosophical backgrounds of different groups of the peoples. In Africa, Asia, Australia, America and Europe considerations on the punishment differ.

African punishment

Africans argue that corporal punishment is culturally justified; that it is traditionally acceptable in Africa and tallies with African norms and values. They believe that the use of the rod brings out the best in an African child. According to (Nagawa, 1998) African educationists claim that corporal punishment is cheap and easy to administer, that it is always available, elicits quick response and requires little intelligence; that in its use, corporal punishment is straight forward, and logically acceptable compared to other types of punishment. For (Mararike, 2005) physical punishment is justified by the long tradition under the colonial rule in Africa. During the colonial era, Africans who refused to pay taxes or who did not obey were caned in public. Caning was a symbol of authority since an African lawbreaker was canned by the colonizers. So, parents and teachers have to play similar role because without corporal punishment, the school would descend into chaos, children would become more unruly by the time they reach high school.

In Kenya, parents, teachers and administrators who support the use of physical punishment believe that physical punishment is necessary to teach children a lesson, to discourage them make similar mistakes in future (Human Rights Watch, 1999). In Uganda, many studies have been carried out on the issue. The following are examples of declarations and research findings about the punishment. Eremu (2004), reports that parents petitioned, saying that the absence of the cane in schools was responsible for poor performance; that supervised caning as a disciplinary measure was fine. Zinjak (2004), also reports on the view of a Ugandan local authority claiming that too much freedom was bad because children misused it and this resulted into thieves. Then parents and teachers were directed not to abide by the new Law forbidding the caning of children when they do wrong, because the use of the cane to pupils who misbehave instills the disappearing discipline in the children. Another research indicated that parents and students said that abolishing physical punishment would be a hindrance to the maintenance of discipline (Nagawa, 1998). Furthermore, Naker (2005), in her research findings disclosed that 87.9% of parents in Uganda supported the use of the punishment because it guides child's behavior and 32.6% recognized that physical punishment is important because it changes bad behavior in the child.

Moreover research findings showed that in Ugandan national schools, 28.6% of school administrators supported the use of physical punishment for the reason that it makes pupils understand quickly, 23% recognized that physical punishment improves academic performance, and 20% of them stressed that simple words do not help African children. The same research indicated that referring to the Ugandan tradition on corrective measures, 17.1% of school administrators reported that physical punishment should continue because it was in use since the ancient times in Uganda, to mean that all Ugandan Leaders went through the same practice. Responding to a Likert scale in the same research, majority of the parents disagreed that a teacher who beats children should be dismissed from school. This means that parents did not support dismissal of the teachers even if they use physical punishment on their children. The statement on dismissal of teachers who beat children was rejected by 74.3% of the pupils in national schools. Even in international schools, 48% of the pupils disagreed with the statement. This shows that in national schools, pupils do not wish dismissal of their teachers even if they physically punish them. On the other hand, majority (82.9%) of the pupils in Uganda national schools agreed that physical punishment is a good corrective measure and 59% of them disagreed that physical punishment has negative impacts. In the same schools, 98.6% of the pupils agreed that physical punishment keeps discipline. The research revealed that parents, teachers, local leaders and school administrators in Uganda have recognized the benefits of physical punishment in schools. Parents in Ugandan national schools wanted physical punishment to continue because warnings to their children had failed. They said that physical punishment is the only option of instilling sanity in the child; that physical punishment makes the child aware of the wrong done. Pupils in Ugandan national schools have also known that it is only physical punishment which can keep them disciplined (Mbikyo, 2012).

These researchers divulged what have been going on in Ugandan homes and schools; there, many events related to negative behavior have influenced Ugandan children and youth in the name of modernization and

observance of children's rights. The above research findings show how educational benefit of physical punishment is recognized by education stakeholders.

Physical punishment is not only supported by Africans. The caning was a common punishment in many parts of Asia, Europe and in several European colonies in the 19th Century and the early 20th century. In schools, the cane used was called light or junior cane which was administered to young school children. Dalya (2004) describes practices of physical punishment by educators in Asia, Australia, and America.

Asian punishment

Dalya (2004) stipulates that in Asia, some philosophers stressed that learning should not be cheap, because there is no learning without pain. The author states the example of Plato (427-347 BC) who claimed that it was well and good if the child obeys; if not, he is straightened by threats and blows like a piece of wood; Aristotle (384-322) claimed that youths should not be instructed in amusement; instead of learning with amusement, learning must be accompanied with pain through which the child should be disgraced and beaten. Whatever the knowledge, skills and habits the child may benefit from learning, he/she must suffer to acquire it; appraising or punishing a child depends on obedience or disobedience. He exposes that the Spartan society believed that beatings were to promote obedience, value and to harden the body and soul, all for the service of the State. In Eastern Asia, paddling of children is still allowed. Then in China and Taiwan, corporal punishment is still widely practiced in schools. There, it is legal to punish one's own child using physical pain. People of this Region believed that a minimum amount of corporal punishment against their own children was appropriate and necessary. So, punishing physically a child showed that the child belongs to the parent. In ancient India, a wife, a son, a slave and a pupil who had committed faults was beaten with ropes or split bamboo on the back part of the body not on the noble parts. Physical punishment was therefore the result of wrongdoings, especially to individuals with inferior social status. In Kuwait, when a child lies, his/ her tongue was scorched with a hot knife and when he steals his/her hands were burned.

Hebrews believed that physical punishment led to corrections, discipline, and taught wisdom to the child. Hebrews' statements on physical punishment are found in the Bible. In Proverbs 13: 24, it is stipulated that "Whoever spares the rod does not like his son, but whoever loves him disciplines him carefully". "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22: 15). "A rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to him disgraces his mother" (Proverbs 29:15). So, in this part of the World, physical punishment was related to educational purposes, training and other ways of living. In the practice of physical punishment, Australian aborigines deliberately inflicted physical pain on the boy as a training and test of manhood.

American punishment

In certain tribes of North American Indians, beating was a common punishment; flagellation was considered as a cure for disease and a sexual stimulant. For these societies, physical punishment was intended for training, testing how one has become mature, healing somebody and stimulating one's sexual capability.

Today, students in the US are educated to enjoy too much freedom and children's rights. This way of living has led children to be unruly by the families and schools. The consequences are observed worldwide because it is there where media report that children beat their parents and teachers; it is there where pupils shoot parents, teachers and comrades. The research findings of (Starr, 2002) revealed that it was stunning to discover that corporal punishment in schools has been made legal in 23 States of the USA, and that 26% of Americans agreed that elementary school teachers should be allowed to spank their students. Starr demonstrates that currently, physical punishment in public has been made legal in some American States such as Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, etc. The research findings concluded that for American children, physical punishment as a customary is a necessary technique starting from the child rearing period.

European punishment

Here, whoever attended school was expected to be beaten so that he/she could acquire properly the required knowledge. Describing the use of physical punishment, Wilson (2001) reports that in Rome, schools were places of regular beatings with a scutia (a leather strap), the ferula (rod), the flagellum (a whip of number of knotted strands), or the virga (a birch-switch). Fournier (2004) conducted an interview with a French young man who declared that the absence of spanking in his childhood negatively affected his discipline because the absence of physical punishment made him a disoriented man who lacks some landmarks in his present life. This means that the French young man acknowledged the benefit of physical punishment. Supporting the use of physical punishment, Fournier has demonstrated that in education, spanking should not be an isolated measure. During the survey on the use of corporal punishment, the findings pointed out that students and teachers supported the use of corporal punishment. In that school-wide survey, 14 out of 45 of the teachers listed corporal punishment as being the effective discipline tool. They argued that corporal punishment is the best because once students have been paddled for bad behaviour, they rarely repeat it. The second survey instructed that of 39 students, 18 listed corporal punishment as being the most effective punishment because paddling makes the culprit think and wonder about himself/herself and tries to avoid the swat (Yancey, 1999). It is important to note that the declarations and research findings above indicate that the punishment still has its place in schools.

Conclusion

This article has shown, through declarations and research findings, that education stakeholders have recognized and exhibited the value of physical punishment, parents, teachers, school administrators, leaders, policy-makers,

students and pupils support the use of physical punishment. The paper also indicates that currently, in western countries, policy-makers, teachers, students and pupils support the use of physical punishment after a long time of its prohibition.

The author appeals to other researchers to find out the views of Rwandan education stakeholders towards the use of physical punishment in the Rwandan society which argues that “*igiti kigororwa kikiri gito*” (meaning that a tree is given the appropriate shape when it is still young). In education, this means that it is easy to manipulate the child’s character when he/she is still young. Researchers should find out whether this saying is still valued in Rwanda and reveal contemporary challenges that it faces because the parent or the teacher can always give the appropriate moral education to the child, but outside the family or the school, he /she will be spoiled by other children who misbehave. As we all know, children are nowadays being driven by various facts under the turmoil of globalization, which lead them to be guilty. Although it does not show that children physically punished always behave in an expected manner, one should refer to his/her daily experience and find out which kind of disciplinary measure would maintain the glory of our society.

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