

An Exploratory Study of Corporal Punishment by Teachers in Zimbabwean Schools: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT This study sought to explore the issues and challenges faced by teachers on use of corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools. A case study design that is mainly qualitative in nature with some aspects of the quantitative approach was used in this study. Data were collected manually from the perpetrators' files kept at the Masvingo regional offices. The study found 17 cases of unauthorised corporal punishment in schools reported to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in Masvingo region of Zimbabwe. Data were analysed using percentages and tables. The study found 17 cases of unauthorised corporal punishment were committed by teachers. These findings are merely a-tip-of-the-iceberg because most cases of corporal punishment are never reported to the authorities by the victims for fear of reprisals by the perpetrators. The implications of the findings were discussed in detail in the study.

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that corporal punishment has been a conventional method of disciplining children and has become a very controversial issue to eliminate in schools locally and internationally (Chemhuru 2010; Newell 1993; O'Brian and Lau 1995; Shumba 2003a; Shumba et al. 2010; Zindi 1995).

In their study, Shumba et al. (2010: 6) found that the majority of the pupils (84.5%) believe that teachers physically abuse them because 'they want to control pupils who do wrong things'. The study also found that pupils hold various myths and beliefs on why teachers use corporal punishment in schools, especially the conviction that corporal punishment is the only language that some pupils understand better in order to learn. By definition, corporal punishment refers to intentional application of physical pain as a method of changing behavior (Shumba 2003a; Straus and Kaufman 1994) and includes such methods as hitting, slapping, spanking, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking using various objects such as wooden

paddles, belts, sticks, electric cords or others (Grossman et al. 1995; Shumba 2003a,b, 2001).

There are some child-rearing practices within the home that mandate parents to use corporal punishment when disciplining their own children (Chemhuru 2010; Shumba 2003a). However, there are laws and regulations within the schools that forbid teachers from using corporal punishment (Statutory Instrument 1 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2000: Statutory Instrument 65 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 1992). In communities in which the school has developed as a recognizable social institution, corporal punishment has not only been tolerated but has been prescribed as an essential part of the pedagogue's function (Dow and Mogwe 1992; O'Brian and Lau 1995; Payne 1989; Sebonego 1994). Hence, the belief that corporal punishment is a necessary and effective way of disciplining children has become engrained and uncritically accepted in most traditions. This belief has been used as a justification for the kind of corrective action in society and schools. As such, it has become very difficult to draw a line between what happens in the school and the home since the school is an extension of what happens in the home (Shumba 2003a, b and 2001; Shumba and Moorad 2000; Straus 1994). The home culture is extended to the school by some teachers in the name of discipline, with teachers acting *in-loco-parentis* within the school (Shumba 2002; 2001). Hence,

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some teachers seem to view this as exercising their *loco-parentis* role within the school and not as a violation of any regulations (Dow and Mogwe 1992; Magagula 1992; Sebonego 1994; Shumba 2003a, b). Research notes that parents and teachers who were physically abused during their childhood are more supportive of corporal punishment than those who were not (Hyman et al. 1988). This implies that violence is transferred from generation to generation and perhaps suggests why some teachers use corporal punishment in schools. Some parents who were beaten at home or school claim that they never suffered any negative consequences (Hyman et al. 1988; Payne 1989; Poole et al. 2003).

In their study carried out by the South African Human Research Council (HSRC), parents admitted to hitting their children and nearly a third of parents said that they beat them severely (Ntshingila 2004). The study found that: (1) a third of those who admitted to hitting their children said they beat them severely using a belt, stick or other objects; (2) divorced parents were more likely than married ones to smack their children; (3) Black parents were most likely to beat their children severely, followed by White and Coloured parents, with Indian parents the least likely to do so; (4) children under three years were likely to be 'smacked' but from four up, were more likely to be 'beaten'; (5) parents aged 25 to 35 were most likely to smack their children, while those over 35 were more likely to beat their children; and (6) there was a link between parents who maltreated their children and those in physically abusive relationships with their partners (Ntshingila 2004: 1). Despite the incidence of corporal punishment revealed by the study, current research shows that South Africans hit their children less than the Americans or Britons where similar studies show that 90 % of children will be smacked at this stage of development (Newell 1993; Ntshingila 2004; Payne 1989; Poole et al. 2003; Shumba 2001; Shumba and Moorad 2000; Straus 1991, 1994 and 1996). Although most experts in South Africa have called for the banning of corporal punishment in the home, this is a tall order to implement and control. Similarly, Alvy (1987) compared Black Head Start parents' beliefs about spanking with those of low income white and higher income white parents of preschoolers. Alvy (1987) found that white

parents, particularly higher income whites, were ambivalent about spanking, and reported spanking out of anger or as a last resort. Black parents, on the other hand, viewed spanking more positively, and were much more likely to see physical punishment as a valuable tool for teaching such central lessons as obedience to authority, appropriate social behavior, and right from wrong. It is clear from the above studies that parents use corporal punishment to discipline their children at home. Since teachers are parents and *act in loco-parentis* within the school, they are likely to use corporal punishment in schools.

Both local and international literature suggests that Black parents believe that corporal punishment is part of the African culture of child-rearing practices (Dow and Mogwe 1992; Sebonego 1994; Shumba 2003a and 2001; Zindi 1995). It is common practice by most Black parents to use corporal punishment when disciplining their own children at home and some parents believe that corporal punishment makes pupils 'perform well' in school (Shumba 2003a, b, 2001). As such, some of the parents seem to be completely and totally oblivious of the laws and regulations that govern the treatment of pupils by their teachers in schools because whatever teachers do is believed to be 'always right' (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Shumba 2003b).

On the contrary, school practice should be different from that at home because there are stipulated regulations and procedures on how to discipline pupils in schools (The Secretary of Education Circular P 35 1993; Statutory Instrument 65 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 1992). According to the Statutory Instrument 1 (2000) of Zimbabwe, only the school head or a teacher to whom authority has been delegated by the head, or any other teacher in the presence of the head, can inflict corporal punishment on boys on the buttocks with a suitable strap, cane or smooth light switch (The Secretary for Education and Culture Circular P 35 1993; Statutory Instrument 65 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 1992). In the case of girls, the law stipulates that corporal punishment should be administered on hands and not on buttocks (The Secretary for Education and Culture Circular P 35 1993; Statutory Instrument 65 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 1992). Any teacher found guilty of breaching the above stipulated regulations and procedures is charged with miscon-

duct by the Public Service Commission (the employer of all teachers in Zimbabwe).

In their study, Dubanoski et al. (1983) found that both society and teachers hold four common myths about corporal punishment: (a) that corporal punishment builds character; (b) that corporal punishment teaches respect; (c) that corporal punishment is the only thing some children understand; and, (d) that without corporal punishment, behavioral problems increase. Other studies found that some cultures view the deliberate infliction of pain on children 'as vital to the development of strength, endurance and cultural allegiance' (Anderson and Payne 1994; O'Brian and Lau 1995; Payne 1989). Similarly, in some cultures, corporal punishment is viewed as an instrument used in teaching the child values and norms of the society during the parenting process (Benatar 2004; Straus 1991). However, Greven (1990) argues that while corporal punishment is viewed as a positive aspect of parenting that provides children with the necessary structure of personality growth, it involves inflicting pain partly for retribution, and teaches a child that those in power can force others to obey. If corporal punishment has effects on children, it is debatable whether or not it promotes positive cultural values and norms of the society (Dow and Mogwe 1992; Shumba 2003a, 2002). Similar findings show that those who believe in the use of corporal punishment in schools view it as the only technique left to preserve academic control (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Payne 1989; Sebonego 1994; Straus 1994). It is such cultures that condone violence against children as acceptable and useful in society that have made physical abuse or corporal punishment very difficult to eliminate in schools worldwide (Anderson and Payne 1994; Dow and Mogwe 1992; Dubanoski et al. 1983; Sebonego 1994; Shumba 2003a, b, 2001).

Similarly, Shumba (2003a) found that some teachers who use corporal punishment in schools have the tendency of becoming emotional when dealing with pupils and end up taking the law into their hands. It is when they are in such an emotional state that such school heads or teachers tend to by-pass the stipulated procedures by the Public Service Commission that teachers should obtain a mandate to use corporal punishment on their pupils from the school head (The Secretary of Education Circular P 35 1993; Statutory Instrument 65 of the Constitution of

Zimbabwe 1992; Statutory Instrument 1 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2000). Other studies also show that most cases of physical assault reported tend to involve injuries on pupils and such cases are handled and processed by the police before being handed over to the courts of law (Newell 1993; Shumba 2003a, b, 2001).

In their study to determine the prevalence and determinants of corporal punishment in preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) schools in Alexandria, Youssef et al. (1998), found that a substantial proportion of boys (79.96%) and girls (61.53%) incurred physical punishment at the hand of their teachers. Teachers were using their hands, sticks, straps, shoes, and kicks to inflict such punishment without sparing a part of their students' body (Youssef et al. 1998). Physical injuries were reported by a significantly higher percentage of boys the most common being bumps and contusions followed by wounds and fractures. Youssef et al. (1998) found that it was only among boys that serious injuries such as loss of consciousness and concussion were encountered. This study indicated that corporal punishment in school was used extensively to discipline students whose behaviour did not conform to the desired standard of educational institutions.

School has always been recognized as an institution for the transfer of knowledge and culture to the future generation. It has also a major influence on the child's development and behavior (Wolkind and Rutter 1990) since it is a dynamic human system dedicated to the nurturing of mutual growth and understanding between children and adults (Schultz et al. 1987). In schools, teachers play an important role as educators and disciplinarians (Wilson 1982). To assume their responsibilities, teachers sometimes resort to the use of physical punishment. Such means of punishment has been met with great opposition (Youssef et al. 1998) as it is no longer perceived as a method of discipline. Discipline implies imparting knowledge and promoting skills to improve one's behavior rather than corporal punishment. Although the use of corporal punishment on school students is banned by a ministerial decree in Egypt, the number of incidents which occurred in Alexandria during the scholastic year 1996–1997 included the one of a child who incurred retinal detachment at the hand of his teacher indicated that corporal punishment in schools was used

extensively in schools. It is against this background that this study sought to determine the nature and extent of corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools.

The physical punishment of children is highly normative in the United States, both with regard to its acceptance and its practice. Virtually all parents spank their children (Straus 1991; Wauchope and Straus 1990), and the vast majority of American adults favour corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique (Flynn 1998). Research shows that the more a parent favours corporal punishment, the more likely that parent is to use it with his or her children (Straus 1991). Understanding individuals' attitudes toward spanking seems to be an important component of predicting who may actually physically punish their children. Given the growing evidence of the potentially harmful consequences of "ordinary" spanking (for example, Straus 1991; Straus and Gimpel 1992; Straus and Kaufman 1994), many researchers argue for the eventual elimination of physical punishment as a disciplinary strategy (Straus 1994; Shumba 2001). Reducing the use of corporal punishment will likely depend in part on addressing the powerful normative endorsement of spanking enjoyed among the general public.

However, very little is known about when most people think spanking is appropriate. Most studies have examined the attitudes toward physical punishment by focusing on more general attitudes toward spanking, attempting to assess support for corporal punishment in a broader normative context (for example, Deley 1988; Ellison and Sherkat 1992; Flynn 1998). Others have looked at more specific aspects of attitudes, using such items as whether one favours spanking or slapping a 12-year-old child, or whether one intends to spank one's own children (for example, Graziano and Namaste 1990; Straus et al. 1980). Only a few studies have examined the nature and extent of corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools.

Studies show that incidences of spanking decline with age although nearly half of parents report physically punishing children as old as twelve (Wauchope and Straus 1990). Less is known about how attitudes toward spanking are related to the age of the child. Three studies below have examined support for corporal punishment in various contexts found that these have involved diverse and specific populations

(Grasmick et al. 1992; McCormick 1992). Only McCormick (1992) looked at how attitudes were related to both situation and age of child. McCormick (1992) surveyed 619 family physicians and pediatricians in Ohio about their attitudes about "striking the child's buttocks or hand with an open hand lightly, leaving no mark except transient redness" (p. 3163).

Grasmick et al. (1992) surveyed a random sample of Oklahoma City residents about their attitudes toward corporal punishment in schools. Respondents were asked in five different situations whether "teachers should spank school children." Of the five scenarios presented, respondents were most likely to favour spanking a child that deliberately injured another child, followed by stealing from the school or another child, using obscene language, talking back to the teacher, and skipping school without a reason. Two-thirds agreed that spanking was appropriate when used against a child who had intentionally hurt another child, but only one-fifth agreed that children who skipped school should be physically punished. No target age for the child was given. The above findings clearly show that the sample studied believes in the use of corporal punishment despite that this is contrary to international laws that protect children against this form of child abuse.

In his study of corporal punishment, Ruane (1993) found the following five scenarios with the lowest disapproval ratings for corporal punishment: holding a pillow over baby sister's face, threatening the parent with a knife, hitting the parent first, deliberately breaking the father's camera, and calling the grandmother an old bitch. The five scenarios with the highest disapproval ratings were: child has not cleaned his/her room, parent is furious, parent is having problems at work, child is dawdling and makes the parents late, and child breaks the father's camera by being careless. For the remaining 60% of the scenarios, Ruane (1993) identified neither the typical response of her subjects as reflecting neither approval nor disapproval of force, but ambivalence toward the use of corporal punishment.

Chemhuru (2010) examined the issue of punishment in the process of education within the Zimbabwean context, as it applies to primary and secondary school formal education. The paper addressed the problem as to whether punishment as a tool of educating should be part of

the process of education. Despite the growing consensus that punishment breaches children's fundamental human rights, Chemhuru (2010) provided a philosophical justification of the institution of punishment, contrary to these contemporary calls from humanitarian quarters for the abolition of punishment from the Zimbabwean education. Chemhuru (2010) argues that since education is a process through which desirable states of the mind are developed in a morally acceptable manner, corporal punishment is a tool for conformity and practice in the process of educating primary and secondary school children within the Zimbabwean context. Hence, despite its purported negative and legal implications, corporal punishment serves the retributive, deterrent and reformative functions (Chemhuru 2010). The above study argues for the use of corporal punishment in schools.

Goals of the Study

This study sought to explore issues and challenges faced by teachers on use of corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools.

METHOD

Research Design

A case study design that is mainly qualitative in nature with some aspects of the quantitative approach was used in this study. The design was found to be relevant to explore issues and challenges faced by teachers on corporal punishment in schools.

Sample

The sample comprised of 17 cases of unauthorized corporal punishment inflicted by teachers in schools reported to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in Masvingo region of Zimbabwe from 2005 to 2011. The perpetrators' files used were the only available files during this period. Records of all reported cases of corporal punishment committed by teachers were kept within its regional office.

Instruments

Document analysis was done in this study. Perpetrators' 6 personal files were scrutinised

in order to capture data on perpetrator's status; year abuse was committed; Grade/Form level of victim; case reported to whom; nature of corporal punishment committed; and action taken by the Public Service Commission against the perpetrators. The above data was vital in drawing inferences about issues and challenges faced by teachers on corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools.

Data Collection

Data on issues and challenges of corporal punishment perpetrated on learners were manually extracted from the perpetrators' civil service personal files that are kept at the regional offices in Masvingo region of Zimbabwe. Data of reported cases on spanking were manually extracted by the officers who handle the perpetrators' records kept at the regional offices in Masvingo region of Zimbabwe. Data from the perpetrators' files was confidential and was only used for purposes of this study. The researchers were assisted to compile data from the perpetrators' files by officers responsible for handling child abuse cases within the Regional Office. The officers responsible for handling child abuse cases were the only ones that were allowed to provide such data to researchers. For ethical purposes, data from the perpetrators' files were provided in a table according to years by the officers who handle discipline cases within the Regional Offices. In cases where more details were required such as the nature of abuse committed or the age of the victim, the officers provided this data to the researchers on request.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using tables and percentages in this study. Data were analysed as follows: perpetrator; status of perpetrator; year case was committed; case of victim; case reported to whom; nature of physical abuse committed; and action taken by the Public Service Commission.

Ethical Issues

Permission to collect data of reported cases of corporal punishment was sought from the Head Office of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture and this was granted. A letter grant-

ing permission was issued by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. The researchers took this letter to the Masvingo Regional Office. Permission to access the files of reported cases of corporal punishment was granted by the Masvingo Regional Office where the study was carried out. Only the officers responsible for handling discipline cases within the regional office provided the researchers with the required information on cases of corporal punishment committed by teachers in schools from 2005 to 2011.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows 17 reported cases of unauthorized corporal punishment on pupils from 2005 to 2011 in Masvingo schools.

Table 1 presents data about perpetrator; status of the perpetrator; year abuse was committed; case of victim; case reported to whom; nature of corporal punishment committed; and action taken against the perpetrator by the Public Service Commission. Since this study was an exploratory case study of 17 cases of corporal punishment reported in Masvingo region during the period 2005 to 2011, it was adequate for this purpose. Table 1 shows that 4 of the perpetrators were teachers and 2 were school

heads; most cases were committed between 2007 and 2011; 13 victims were in Forms 3 to 6; two each were in Forms 2 and 4; 14 victims were female and 3 were male; and all the perpetrators were accused of beating their victims with a stick and in one case the perpetrator used bare hands to clap a male pupil who collapsed and was taken to hospital for treatment. The findings of the study showed that some of the perpetrators were discharged from the teaching service and others were found not guilty of the offences. The reasons for those teachers who were found not guilty were that there was bad blood between former head and teachers and these reasons were contained in the perpetrators' files. The above findings show that despite the banning of corporal punishment in schools, it is still being used on learners by teachers. Despite the regulations stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, and international laws that protect children against the use of corporal punishment in schools, this problem remains a challenge to Zimbabwean teachers.

DISCUSSION

In Zimbabwe, only the school head has the mandate to use corporal punishment in schools

Table 1: Reported cases of unauthorized corporal punishment on pupils from 2005 to 2011 in Masvingo schools

<i>Perpetrator</i>	<i>Status of perpetrator</i>	<i>Year abuse committed</i>	<i>Case of victim</i>	<i>Case reported to whom</i>	<i>Nature of physical abuse</i>	<i>Action taken</i>
1.	Teacher	2007	12 Forms 3-6 girls	Police and School Head	beating with a stick	Discharged from the teaching service
2.	Teacher	2008	Form 2 boy (same school as case 3)	District office	Accused of beating	Found not guilty and reason was bad blood between former head and teachers
3.	Teacher	2008	Form 2 boy (same school as case 3)	District office	Accused of beating	Found not guilty and reason was bad blood between former head and teachers
4.	Teacher	2010	Form 4 boy	Police and Head	beating using a stick and injured the boy	Discharged from the teaching service
5.	Head	2011	Grade 3	Deputy Head reported case to the police	Beat up the child with a stick	Found not guilty and reason was bad blood between Deputy Head and Head
6.	Head	2009	Form 4	Hospital reported to police and District office	Used bare hands to clap male pupil and collapsed	Discharged from the teaching service

(Statutory Instrument 65 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 1992). The present study found that 3 boys and 14 girls suffered corporal punishment at the hands of their teachers. The perpetrators used sticks to administer corporal punishment on learners. This finding is consistent with literature (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Shumba 2003a, b) that teachers used corporal punishment on learners in schools.

The study found that all the perpetrators of corporal punishment were male. This implies that these male teachers are likely to be using corporal punishment at home and since they act in *loco-parentis* within the school, they use it on pupils. Several studies reported that physical injuries resulting from corporal punishment in schools caused serious physical damage (Eichelberger et al. 1991). It is these teachers who administered unreasonable and excessive corporal punishment who were found guilty of assault (Wilson 1982).

Moreover, their adoption of such disciplinary means could stem from the criticized old philosophy that corporal punishment is the key for the development of the child's conscience (Poole et al. 1991), build character (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Poole et al. 1991) besides being the only language some children could understand (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Shumba 2003a, b). Some studies found that corporal punishment is emotionally destructive (Dubanoski et al. 1983) and positive reinforcement is more effective (Dolins and Christoffel 1994) and long lasting in building character (Poole et al. 1991). Certainly, the infliction of corporal punishment will affect the quality of teacher-pupil relationship (Schultz et al. 1987) and cut off all modes of effective communication (Dubanoski et al. 1983) that play a crucial role in promoting students' emotional health and well being (Schultz et al. 1987).

The study found that most victims of corporal punishment were beaten using sticks and bare hands. This finding concurs with literature that pupils who were physically punished in schools were the ones more likely to be subjected to the same method of punishment at home as well (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Shumba 2003a, b). It appears that the same behaviour not tolerated by parents is also not tolerated by teachers evoking similar response. Since teachers act in *loco-parentis* at school, they are likely to administer corporal punishment in schools (Shumba et al. 2010; Zindi 1995).

As a result of the above shared experiences, some parents believe that it is critically important to instill obedience and respect for authority in their children favour the use of physical punishment to accomplish these ends (Chemhuru 2010; Ntshingila 2004). This explains why some teachers are more likely to favour spanking a child who misbehaves in public (Dubanoski et al. 1983; Hyman et al. 1988). Perhaps from their own experiences and socialization, such teachers understand that a child who misbehaves in public would be viewed as a bad child.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that teachers who use corporal punishment did not follow the recommended procedures of seeking permission from the school head before executing it on learners. The perpetrators of corporal punishment include both teachers and school heads. This implies that the perpetrators use it against the laws in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Schools should conduct awareness workshops and seminars about the effects of corporal punishment on learners. Learners will be empowered against corporal punishment and report the perpetrators to the authorities.
- Perpetrators of corporal punishment found guilty of the offence should be prosecuted by the courts of law since this is classified as assault of learners.
- Further research on the most appropriate methods of punishment needs to be carried out to ensure learner discipline in schools in Zimbabwe.

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