

## Corporal Punishment: Coping Strategies Adopted by the Adolescents

Charu Raikhy\* and Sukhminder Kaur

*Department of Human Development, College of Home Science, Punjab Agricultural University,  
Ludhiana 141 001, Punjab, India*

*E-mail: \*<charu\_piscs82@yahoo.co.in, charupau@gmail.com, raikhy.charu@yahoo.co.in>*

**KEYWORDS** Adolescents. Students. Schools. Education. Coping Strategies. Corporal Punishment

**ABSTRACT** The study aimed to find out the coping strategies adopted by the adolescents to combat corporal punishment at school. A sample of 200 adolescents both boys and girls (12-16 years) from co-educational Government Senior Secondary Schools of Ludhiana city was studied. Data were collected using Personal Information Sheet, a self structured Interview schedule relating to corporal punishment and coping strategies adopted by the adolescents. Eighty one per cent of the adolescents reported to have experienced varying intensities of corporal punishment at school; 9.50 per cent of them suffered severe punishment. Adolescents adopted various coping strategies to combat punishment by the teachers at school.

### INTRODUCTION

For a loving, respectful, self-disciplined child, harsh and cruel punishment is not the only resolution. Discipline in the raising and teaching of children is necessary if they are to become social, productive and responsible adults. Punishment is only a method of disciplining and corporal punishment is only one aspect of punishment (Sanderson 2003). Parents, guardians and teachers, who use harsh and punitive practices to discipline their children, may succeed in making the child conform to their standards but resentment will be reflected by the child's behaviour sooner or later. A frequently punished child will be a problematic person tomorrow because the child being sensitive reacts to the behaviour and disciplinary practices of adults either at school or at home (Kaur 2005). Discipline is the essence of socialization process, which begins at home and is nurtured at school.

Frequency and severity of corporal punishment are inconsistently defined and measured and these vary from culture to culture, nation to nation and situation to situation (Gershoff 2002). Punishing means subjecting a penalty for an offense and usually includes inflicting some kind of hurt. Corporal punishment refers to "use of force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behaviour (Straus 1994). These definitions are synonymous with the one given by Thomas and Peterson (1986), a practice

of disciplining in which some-thing unpleasant is present or positive reinforcers are removed following a behaviour so that it happens less often in future. All these harsh disciplinary measures adopted by authoritarian/totalitarian parents and teachers to discipline children lead to anti-social behaviour, contributes to the academic failure and social rejection. These conditions further reduce self-esteem and create depressed mood which in turn add to the like-lihood of delinquency in adolescents (Patterson 1982). Corporal punishment, if very frequent, may become an on going hardship for children and it has greater potential for producing negative effects (Pearlin 1989).

Corporal punishment is being used as a means of disciplining action against children and students worldwide but as catalytic action of education, it needs to be planned meticulously and executed with great sensitivity (Pandey 2001). Inconsistent or overuse of punishment in harsh and unskilled ways can have very undesirable, dangerous and long lasting effects on the children who may develop negative personality traits such as disliking the punishing person, developing strong fears and anxieties, obstacles with learning, learning to escape and avoid people, places, and things associated with harsh punishment which stimulates aggression and they imitate the methods of punishment used by their parents and teachers (Mawhinney and Petersen 1986).

Corporal punishment is physiologically as well as psychologically damaging. Since it affects

the child by not only inflicting physical pain but also mental harassment, feeling of helplessness, worthlessness, depression, inhibition, aggression, shame and self-doubt, guilt, social withdrawal, feeling of inferiority, rigidity, lowered self-esteem, stress and heightened anxiety which may reduce his/her self confidence (Pandey 2001) and sometimes compel the students to take extreme steps extending to even suicide attempts (Kaur 2005). All these factors affect the manner in which an adolescent copes with such situations.

Coping is viewed as a response to perceived stress and is defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). More broadly coping means "behavioural strategies used to manage a stressful situation" (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) which vary from individual to individual.

Adolescence is the developmental period of transition from dependant childhood to self-sufficient adulthood. It is considered the most stressful time (Clarke, Perlmutter and Freidman 1988; Harper and Marshall 1991) when individuals are confronted by a multitude of stressors arising from physical and cognitive development to social and emotional changes. During this period they are required to develop personal values and a sense of identity, fulfill social roles with peers and members of opposite sex, complete the requirements of schooling and make decisions regarding a career. Adequate coping skills and adoptive cognitive and behavioural styles are vital for effective transition and adjustment to adulthood (Frydenberg and Lewis 1993). An inability to cope with these adolescent fears may result in poor academic achievement and poor social relations (Ferrari and Parker 1992) and feeling of hopelessness that can lead to suicidal thoughts (Dixon 1994; Heppner and Rudd 1994). Further, adolescence has been redefined by contemporary theorists as an age of 'challenge and potential' as opposed to the traditional notions of viewing it as a period of 'stress and strain' hence, there is an urgent need to know and understand the experiences of adolescents from a different perspective (Ranganathan 2003). It seems worthwhile to study the adolescents and assess the coping strategies adopted them to combat punishment. Corporal punishment by the teachers during this sensitive phase of human life will have profound effect on their personality, growth and overall development. Yet this sensitive issue relating to

coping strategies adopted by the adolescents towards corporal punishment has not received the requisite attention of the scientists, professionals, policy makers, psycho-logists as well as social workers; consequently there is scant literature and statistical documentation on this aspect. The present study has therefore, been planned with the following objectives:

- To determine the incidence of corporal punishment among adolescents in schools.
- To find out the coping strategies adopted by the adolescents to escape punishment.

## METHOD

School going adolescents (both boys and girls) in the age group of (12-16 years) studying in various Government Senior Secondary Schools during the academic year 2005-06 in Ludhiana city of Punjab state were selected for the study.

### Sample Selection

Sample was selected by using multi-stage sampling procedure. Out of sixteen Government Senior Secondary Schools in the city with only six (37.50%) being co-educational; four schools were randomly selected. Following the selection of the schools, the Principals were personally contacted with a request to carry out research work in their schools.

After obtaining the permission from the school Principals, the class in-charges of seventh to tenth grade were personally contacted and lists of the adolescents (both boys and girls) falling in the age group of (12-16years) were prepared. There were 956 adolescents in total in the said age groups in the selected schools and a sample of 50 adolescents (both boys and girls) was randomly drawn from each school using systematic sampling procedure. Thus the final sample comprised of 200 adolescents (both boys and girls).

### Tools

(i) *Personal Information Sheet*: Personal Information Sheet was used to assess the background of the adolescents including information relating to age, gender, birth order, family type, family size, education and occupation of parents, monthly income of the family and parent's participation in the school activities.

(ii) *Interview Schedule relating to Corporal*

*Punishment:* A self structured Interview Schedule was used to assess the incidence of corporal punishment among adolescents by their teachers which consisted of questions with multiple options *viz.* reasons for adolescent's liking and disliking for school, regularity with homework, reactions of teacher(s) towards absentees, methods/ practices of punishment used by the teacher(s) to punish the defaulters, injuries caused due to beating at school, gender category of teachers imparting more punishment to the adolescents, reasons for getting punished at school like academic performance, behaviour and discipline problems, lack of punctuality, personal hygiene and personality problems, etc. After constructing the interview schedule it was circulated among the experts of Human Development and Extension Education and modified in the light of suggestions given by them. The test-retest reliability of the interview schedule was calculated to be 0.84 using Karl Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient.

### **Coping Strategies**

The information relating to the coping strategies adopted by the adolescents to escape punishment was collected while interviewing them using open ended questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected in the schools itself during working days. A close rapport was established with the adolescents through discussions on topics such as their personal problems, hobbies, examination, vocational interests, etc. and the purpose of the study was made clear to them. A close rapport with the adolescents was vital because of sensitivity of the issue and the adolescents would not have revealed their true feelings otherwise. The adolescents were also requested to give honest responses and were assured that their identity would be kept confidential and information provided by them would be used exclusively for the purpose of research. Personal interviews were held to collect information relating to background and corporal punishment of the adolescents. The data were collected by personally interviewing the adolescents and analysed by using frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficient.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Incidence of Corporal Punishment Among Adolescents**

The incidence of corporal punishment among adolescents at school is presented in table 1. For assessing the incidence of corporal punishment, a self-structured Interview Schedule was administered to the adolescents with the score range mentioned for each question and the adolescents were scored according to the scores given in the Interview schedule. The score range in the Interview schedule varied from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 74 and the obtained scores of the adolescents ranged from 12 to 57. To determine the incidence of corporal punishment among the adolescents Mean and Standard Deviation of the scores obtained by the adolescents were calculated and the punished adolescents were segregated by using a formula Mean  $\pm$  Standard Deviation ( $X \pm S.D$ ). The Mean of the scores obtained by the adolescents was calculated to be 31.39 and the Standard Deviation was 12.92. Therefore, the adolescents scoring <18 scores (19.00%) were not considered as punished by their teacher(s) and the rest 81.00 per cent adolescents were considered to be experiencing varying intensity of corporal punishment by their teacher(s) at school; 14.00 per cent scored 18-28 scores, 31.50 per cent scored 28-38, 26.00 per cent scored 38-48 however 9.50 per cent of them were found as severely punished (Fig. 1). The intensity of the corporal punishment increased with increase in the scores obtained by the adolescents which was experienced more by boys (Fig. 2). Similar observations were made by Bryan and Freed (1982) who reported that 95 per cent of the students received corporal punishment at home and school. Khanna (1987) also reported that more than seventy per cent teachers used both physical and non-physical methods to discipline the students in their study, out of which 18.90 per cent teachers adopted only physical methods and 5.50 per cent used only non-punitive methods of punishment. The reason for meting out more punishment to boys as compared to girls may be cultural/stereotypic bias ingrained in the mindsets of the perpetrator and considering girls to be tender and sensitive whereas traits like toughness, irresponsibility, carelessness and aggression are usually associated with boys. Hence, for the same

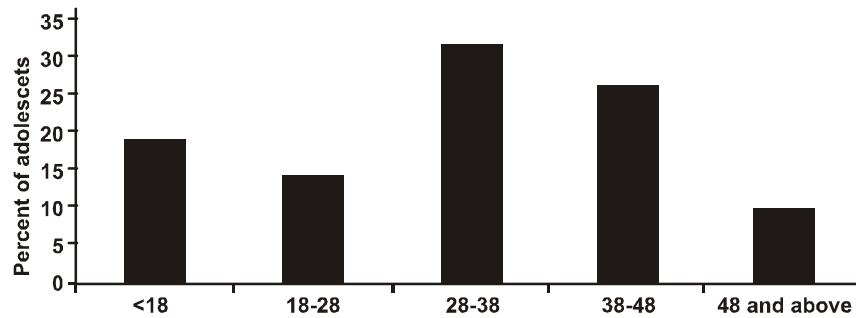


Fig. 1. Incidence of corporal punishment among adolescents (n=200)

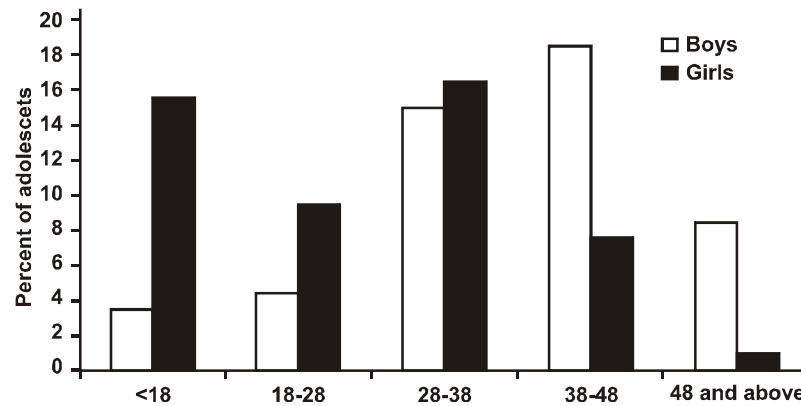


Fig. 2. Genderwise differences in incidence of corporal punishment among the adolescents

Table 1: Incidence of corporal punishment among adolescents by the teacher(s) at school (n=200)

Scores obtained by the adolescents	Frequency and percent of adolescents as per the scores obtained by them					
	Boys (n=100)		Girls (n=100)		Total (n=200)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
< 18	7	3.50	31	15.50	38	19.00
18-28	9	4.50	19	9.50	28	14.00
28-38	30	15.00	33	16.50	63	31.50
38-48	37	18.50	15	7.50	52	26.00
48 and above	17	8.50	2	1.00	19	9.50
Total	100		100		200	100.00

mistake boys are treated with more harshness and cruelty compared to their female counterparts.

#### Coping Strategies Adopted by the Adolescents to Escape Punishment at School

Table 2 presents coping strategies adopted by the adolescents (both boys and girls) to escape punishment while being punished at school by their teacher(s). The results revealed

that majority of the adolescents looked down with shame and suffered in silence while being punished by the teacher. More number of boys (95.65%) as compared to girls (87.09%) adopted this coping strategy.

A significant chunk of adolescents disclosed that they felt guilty and accepted their mistake; this practice was again followed by more boys (30.10%) than girls (17.34%) followed by reacting back to the teacher(s); however less female

**Table 2: Coping strategies adopted by adolescents while being punished by teacher(s) at school (n=162)**

Coping strategies	Frequency and percent of adolescents				
	Boys (n=93)		Girls (n=69)		Total (n= 162)
	f	%	f	%	f
Look down with shame	81	87.09	66	95.65	147
Accept their mistake	28	30.10	12	17.39	40
React back verbally to their teacher	19	20.43	2	2.89	21
Cry for hours at the end	5	5.37	12	17.39	17
Blame other children in the class	11	11.82	0	0	11
Show aggressive facial expression	9	9.67	0	0	9
Cover their face	1	1.07	1	1.44	2
Stare at the teacher	1	1.07	0	0	1

Note: Multiple responses given by the adolescents

**Table 3: Compromising strategies adopted by the adolescents after receiving punishment from teacher(s) (N=162)**

Type of strategies	Frequency and percent of adolescents				
	Boys (n=93)		Girls (n=69)		Total (n= 162)
	f	%	f	%	f
Promise not to repeat the activity for which they received the punishment	83	89.24	69	100.00	152
Complete homework in time	68	73.11	57	82.60	125
Study extra hard for the subject of that particular teacher	58	62.36	55	79.71	113
Discuss with parents and seek guidance	6	6.45	14	20.28	20
Ask/request parents to change the school	3	3.22	6	8.69	9
Become indifferent to whatever teacher says or does	8	8.60	0	0	8
Miss the school on particular day of that teacher's class	4	4.30	0	0	4
Seek sympathy from friends.	3	3.22	0	0	3

Note: Multiple responses given by the adolescents.

adolescents reacted back to their teachers (2.89%) as compared to male adolescents (20.43%). Girls reported that if they reacted back to their teacher(s) things would not smoothen, in fact the situation would get worsen. Adolescents protested verbally when the teacher punished them without realizing their mistake or for somebody else's mistake.

On the other hand incidence of crying for hours after the punishment was more prevalent in case of girls (17.39%) than boys (5.37%). The results also revealed that at times boys (11.82%) blamed other children in the class to escape punishment at school; few boys also exhibited aggressive facial expression followed by other strategies such as covering their face and staring at the teacher(s). Manhas (2003) reported a variety of coping strategies adopted by Kashmiri children like withdrawal, aggression, compensation, guilt and self-blame whenever their integrity as a human being was disturbed.

Table 3 presents the data relating to compromising strategies adopted by the adolescents after

receiving punishment from teacher(s) at school in order of priority. It is evident from the table that majority of the adolescents promised themselves not to repeat the activity for which they received punishment from their teacher(s) at school of which hundred per cent responses came from girls followed by 82.24 per cent boys. Similarly, majority of the girls (82.60%) developed a habit of completing their homework in time followed by boys (73.11%).

The adolescents preferred to study hard for the subject of that particular teacher who punished them as the third compromising strategy to avoid punishment in future from the same teacher which was again adopted by more of girls (79.71%) than boys (62.36%). Girls being more sensitive discussed the problem with their parents (20.28%) and sought guidance from them whereas only 6.45 per cent of boys adopted this compromising strategy. Thus, proving the fact that girls are submissive and take their parent's into confidence for every little happenings and decision of their life. Some of the adolescents,

both boys and girls requested their parents to change the school. The other strategies adopted by only a few boys were to become indifferent to whatever teacher says or does, miss the school on particular day of that teacher's class, seek sympathy from friends.

### CONCLUSION

Corporal punishment has been of great interest to the researchers in the developmental studies of the children, so far. Its potential in causing physical as well as psychological damage has been moderately studied till now. Evidence also suggest that neglect and oversight of social scientists, welfare agencies, NGO's and psychologists lead to dearth of statistics on nature and magnitude of the problem of corporal punishment among children in schools Rani and Bhadramani 1993. Moreover, researches regarding the coping strategies adopted by the adolescents have not yet picked up the required pace and is usually sidelined. It would be wise to bring up such studies so that a holistic approach towards punished adolescents can be adopted and explored further. At the same time an intense review of the policies regarding child care and protection is vital. Effective strategies and preventive and remedial measures are needed to be adopted to check and regulate this mess in the disguise of discipline especially in our Indian Educational system. Seminars, trainings, conferences, workshops and inspection/ surprise checking all should be made mandatory for the school teachers as well as authorities over them. This will help the teachers to enlighten and sensitize regarding appropriate handling of children by avoiding physical punishment and using some psychological measures/techniques to raise healthy, responsible and well-disciplined students which will be a great contribution of the teachers to the society. Teachers must understand and realize that they are the nurturers of love, values and civilization, they are dealing with human beings not with animals.

### REFERENCES

- Bryan JW, Freed FW 1982. Corporal punishment: Normative data and sociological and psychological correlates in a community college population. *J Youth Adol*, 11: 77-87.
- Clarke SA, Perlmutter M, Freidman S 1988. *Lifelong Human Development*. N.Y.: John Wiley and Sons.
- Dixon WA, Heppner PP, Rudd MD 1994. Problem solving appraisal, hopelessness and suicide ideation: evidence for a mediational model, *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 41: 91-98.
- Ferrari JR, Parker JT 1992. High school achievement, self-efficacy, and locus of control as predictors of freshman academic performance, *Psychological Reports*, 71: 515-518.
- Frydenberg E, Lewis R 1993. *Adolescent Coping Scale Administrators Manual*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Gershoff ET 2002. Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviours and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128: 539-579.
- Harper JF, Marshall E 1991. Adolescents problems and their relationship to self-esteem. *Adolescence*, 26: 799-808.
- Kaur S 2005. Wounded innocence. *The Tribune (Spectrum)* 9, October, P. 1.
- Khanna S 1987. *Social Correlates of Child Battering*. M.Phil thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
- Lazarus RS, Folkman S 1984. *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*. New York: Springer.
- Mahwinney V, Petersen C 1986. *Child Development: Parenting and Teaching*. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western Publishing Co.
- Manhas S 2003. Coping strategies among Kashmiri migrant children. *Psychological Studies*, 48: 24-27.
- Pandey S 2001. Corporal punishment in schools. *New Front in Educ*, 31: 347-354.
- Patterson GR 1982. A social learning approach to family intervention: 111 coercive family process. Eugene, OR: Castalia, Cited from Turner HA, Finkelhor D 1996. *J Marr Fam*, 58: 155-166.
- Pearlin LI 1989. The sociological study of stress. *J Health Soc Behav* 30: 241-256 Cited from Turner HA, Finkelhor D 1996. *J Marr Fam*, 58: 155-166.
- Pandey S 2001. Corporal punishment in schools. *New Front in Educ*, 31: 347-354.
- Ranganathan N 2003. Puberty, sexuality and coping: An analysis of the experiences of urban adolescent girls. *Psychological Studies*, 48: 56-63.
- Sanderson B 2003. [san.beck.org/Punishment-Alternatives.html](http://san.beck.org/Punishment-Alternatives.html)
- Singh H 2006. Whack –Smack is the way to go for school teachers. *Hindustan Times*, Ludhiana Live, January, 24, P. 1.
- Straus MA 1994. *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families*. New York: Lexington Books
- Thomas MV, Petersen JC 1986. *Child Development: Parenting and Teaching*. West Chicago: South Western Publishing Co.
- Ujjwala Rani MV, Bhadramni G 1993. Child Abuse in Schools. *Expts in Educ*, 21: 231-238.