

## **Teachers and Pupils Views on Persistent Use of Corporal Punishment in Managing Discipline in Primary Schools in Starehe Division, Kenya**

**Prof. Gerald, N. Kimani**  
Narok University College  
P.O. Box 861 Narok, Kenya

**Augustine, M. Kara**  
Narok University College  
P.O. Box 861 Narok, Kenya

**Teresa B. Ogetange**  
Aga Khan Primary School  
P.O. Box 4424 Nairobi, Kenya

### **Abstract**

Use of corporal punishment to manage discipline continues in primary schools in Kenya despite its ban through a legal notice of the year 2001. There have been several reported cases of teacher use of corporal punishment in schools implying failure of interventions such as guidance and counselling to yield expected results in improving discipline in schools. This study therefore investigated teachers and pupils views on use of corporal punishment in primary schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Simple random sampling was used to select 60 teachers and 300 pupils from the thirty public primary schools in Starehe Division. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the pupils and teachers. Ten headteachers were also interviewed. Data collected were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The study found that corporal punishment was a regular school experience for the pupils. Corporal punishment was administered by everyone in authority at school including prefects. The most prevalent forms of corporal punishment used among pupils at school were canning, slapping, kneeling down, pinching, pulling hair/ears and forced manual work. Headteachers, teachers, and pupils perceived corporal punishment as part of school ethos and culture. The study concluded that school administrators and teachers are not thoroughly prepared to deal with indiscipline in the absence of corporal punishment. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education should train headteachers and teachers on alternative strategies to deal with discipline problems other than use of corporal punishment.

**Key terms:** Corporal punishment, Discipline, Teachers, Pupils, Views, Primary Schools

### **1. Introduction**

According to Rosen (1997), corporal punishment and other forms of cruel and degrading punishment have been widely favoured methods of managing discipline both at home and school. Kubeka (2004) study on disciplinary measures in a primary school in South Africa found that without corporal punishment, teachers opined that discipline cannot be maintained and that children would be disrespectful to the teacher and fail to develop the discipline to work hard. The study also found that the teachers favoured the use of corporal punishment in managing discipline in school since it was quick and easy to administer compared to other discipline management methods which in their view require time, patience and skill which educators often lack.

Gladwell (1999) survey of teachers' attitudes towards corporal punishment after its ban in schools in South Africa reported a sense of despair among teachers attributed mainly to the disruptive behaviour of pupils and the perception among the teachers that their authority had been taken away. Such sentiments from the teachers show that they were not adequately prepared to maintain discipline in schools without corporal punishment. Chamberlain (1996) reports that, in her school in the United Kingdom, the classroom atmosphere is shockingly disrespectful compared to the 1950s and 1960s when corporal punishment was in use.

Pupils are noisy, easily distracted, and occasionally cheeky and rebellious and converse with their neighbors while the teacher is trying to speak. Family life is so much less orderly, society less formal, that children find it hard to understand the concept of appropriate behaviour and terms of address.

Probably, the inadequate training of teachers, combined with crowded classrooms, is repeatedly cited as being a major reason for teachers' inability to initiate learning processes without adopting corporal punishment to restore discipline (UNESCO, 2001). Moreover, the lack of accountability of teachers often leads to teachers using corporal punishment as a method of discipline in schools. In some countries, the use of corporal punishment by teachers is reinforced by its use at home or from teachers' experiences during their own schooling. In Botswana and Kenya, teachers use corporal punishment because it is endorsed by some parents. It is the method they use to discipline their own children at home (Human Rights Watch Kenya, 1999).

The Kenya Human Rights Watch (1999) also notes that violence is a regular part of the school experience. Teachers use caning, slapping and whipping to maintain classroom discipline and to punish pupils for poor academic performance. Bruises and cuts are regular by-products of school punishments and children are exposed to more severe injuries. At times, beatings by teachers leave children permanently disfigured or disabled. Corporal punishment violates both Kenyan law and international human rights standards. Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children's Rights (KAACR, 2007) notes that school corporal punishment in Kenya has a high degree of cultural acceptance and approval. Until when pupils are seriously injured, that is when some stakeholders in education come out strongly to condemn its use in schools.

According to a UNESCO (2001) report, many teachers in Kenya argue that without corporal punishment, schools would descend into chaos. Pupils would become even more unruly by the time they reached high school. According to the report, teachers contend that corporal punishment is one of the few disciplinary tools available to control large class sizes. However, Johnson (2004) reported that many teachers often carry out corporal punishment to maintain discipline in schools without the knowledge of the headmaster. In violation of the rules, students are sometimes beaten all over the body and often, records of corporal punishment are not kept in school. According to Bitensky (1998) cited in Cicognani (2004), children on whom corporal punishment is administered are often left with physical evidence of the abuse. Minor injuries such as bruising and swelling are common; more severe injuries such as large cuts, sprains, broken fingers as well as teeth being knocked out, broken wrists and collar bones, and internal injuries requiring surgery do occur. Children who experience psychological abuse because of corporal punishment or other forms of abuse may suffer from sleep disturbances including the reappearance of bedwetting. They may also experience nightmares, sleepwalking, and fear of falling asleep in a darkened room. Furthermore, somatic symptoms such as stomach-aches, headaches, fatigue, and bowel disturbances can also occur (Hyman, 1990). Corporal punishment also decreases a child's motivation and increases his/her anxiety. As a consequence the ability to concentrate is inhibited and learning is poor (Unicef Asian Report, 2001). The use of corporal punishment also influences children's school attendance. The learning environment is not perceived as safe and school is avoided (Cicognani, 2004).

Corporal punishment was banned in Kenyan schools through Legal Notice No.56 of Kenya Gazette Supplement No.25:199 of 30th March, 2001. Since the ban, school discipline has been deteriorating to such a level that the school system may soon become unmanageable (Kindiki, 2009). Faced with these challenge, the Government of Kenya has implemented several measures aimed at curbing the various cases of indiscipline in learning institutions. Among these has been the establishment of guidance and counseling units in all schools, good classroom management practices, effective teaching methods and inclusion of learner in the making of school rules among others (MOEST, 2005). In spite of these efforts, there have been several reported cases of teacher use of corporal punishment in schools implying failure of the interventions to yield expected results in improving discipline in schools.

In a study conducted among pupils, teachers and Ministry of Education (MOE) officials in Kenya by Human Rights Watch (2007), pupils described how some teachers continue to cane them while others resort to other forms of physical punishment such as standing in the hot sun with their hands in the air for several hours; kneeling on the ground for extended periods; slapping and pinching. In some instances, physical abuse by teachers has led to serious and lasting injuries. Teachers also punish children by giving them harsh tasks such as running long distances or uprooting tree stumps.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2007) review on children's rights in Kenya has expressed concern about corporal punishment at home and school. The Committee reported lack of measures to enforce the prohibition of this practice. In an open letter to the Justice and Constitution Minister, Human Rights Watch Kenya Chapter (2008) notes that some parents have brought their children to school and caned them in front of teachers, or asked the teachers to cane them in their presence. From the review, it is evident that there is a gap between the government policy on use of corporal punishment in Kenyan schools and actual practice. Corporal punishment continues, and the pupils suffer silently in the hands of the very persons entrusted to nurture them into responsible adulthood. This study therefore sought to investigate teachers' and pupils' views on persistent use of corporal punishment in managing discipline in primary schools in Kenya.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent is corporal punishment used on pupils in public primary schools?
2. What are the views of headteachers, teachers, and pupils on use of corporal punishment in schools?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The study was based on Diffusion of Innovations Theory which was developed by Rogers (1995). Diffusion of Innovation Theory describes the processes of individual and social change that occur with the introduction of an innovation. There are five steps in the success or failure of innovation adoption over time, i.e. knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. The persuasion step is the most crucial step in determining whether an innovation is successfully accepted or declined. In this step, the perceived characteristics of the innovation play an important role in influencing potential adopters' decision to adopt or not to adopt the innovation.

Rogers (1995) has incorporated five innovation characteristics as the antecedents to any adoption decision. These characteristics are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability. These perceived characteristics of an innovation explain 49 percent to 87 percent of the variance in the rate of adoption. The characteristics are explained as follows:

- 1) Relative advantage: the degree in which an advantage is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes.
- 2) Compatibility: the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters.
- 3) Complexity: the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use.
- 4) Trialability: is the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis.
- 5) Observability: the degree to which the results of an innovation are viable to others. The easier it is for individuals to see the results of an innovation, the more likely they are to adopt it (Rogers, 1995).

These characteristics are relevant to the study for they explain the persistence in use of corporal punishment despite the presence of legal framework enforcing its ban in schools in Kenya. Alternative methods to corporal punishment have been cited as requiring time, patience and skill, which educators often lack. Alternative methods of maintaining discipline in schools may therefore appear complex compared to corporal punishment which has been entrenched in schools for decades. Corporal punishment is still in use because it is quick and easy to administer (Kubeka, 2004). Teachers therefore opine that alternative methods of maintaining discipline in schools do not have relative advantage over corporal punishment. Preference for corporal punishment is enhanced by the overpopulated classes. Teachers claim that it is impossible to maintain discipline in such classes without its use (Songul, 2009).

Corporal punishment has been used in schools in the past, is widely socially accepted in the education profession, and supported and even encouraged by parents. Teachers themselves will probably have experienced it during their own schooldays. And many teachers are also parents who may have used corporal punishment in bringing up their own children. This may result to teachers' lack of compatibility with the innovative strategies of managing discipline in schools ([www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org)). Religious commitment also appears to play a role in the use of corporal punishment to maintain discipline among children both at home and at school but the evidence is complex and inadequate to draw profound conclusions (Gershoff, 2002). For example, conservative Protestant religions tend to exhibit higher approval rates of corporal punishment when compared to Catholics and atheists (Dietz, 2000).

Ajowi and Simatwa (2010) decry the poor state of guidance and counseling services in Kenyan schools. They observed that guidance and counseling was used in schools only after punishments options had been considered. This may imply lack of teacher knowledge on alternative methods of maintaining discipline in schools.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Consent to conduct the research was sought from the Ministry of Education (MOE). Data was collected from randomly selected 250 pupils and 60 teachers in public primary schools in Starehe Division in Nairobi County using a questionnaire. The study used content validity. The researchers arrived at content validity through the results and comments of the pilot study which was conducted among teachers and pupils in two public primary schools. Items that failed to measure the variables they were intended to measure were modified and others discarded completely. The schools that were used in the pilot study were excluded from the main study.

To establish reliability of the questionnaire, the results of the pilot study were compiled and correlation computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The split half technique was used to ascertain the coefficient of internal consistency or reliability. The reliability for the teachers' questionnaire was found to 0.86 while that of the pupils was 0.89. Ten headteachers were interviewed. Data collected was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data was then presented in frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts. Interpretation of the data was done within the frame of reference of the research objectives.

### 4. Results

The following results were obtained from the study;

#### 4.1 Extent of use of corporal punishment in public primary schools

A key concern for the study was to establish the extent to which corporal punishment is used on pupils in public primary schools. The data obtained revealed that corporal punishment was a reality in the schools. Fifty percent (50%) of the headteachers confirmed that corporal punishment was being used in their schools; a similar percentage (50%) indicated that they did not allow its use. The magnitude of use of corporal punishment in schools was captured by the overwhelming number of student who reported that they were physically punished at school. Ninety one percent (91%) of the pupils reported that they were caned at school. The discrepancy between headteachers' and pupils' data may be accounted by the fact that headteachers know that corporal punished was abolished in Kenya and therefore to admit that they allowed corporal punishment in their schools was to admit that they allowed contravention of the Legal Notice in their schools.

The pupils were asked to list the various persons who administered corporal punished to them at school. The data obtained is summarized on table 1.

**Table 1: Persons who administer corporal punishment on the pupils in school**

Person	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
The teacher on duty	216	86.4
The class teacher	207	82.8
Subject teacher	206	82.4
The deputy head teacher	202	80.8
The head teacher	177	70.8
The prefects	32	12.8

Corporal punishment in school was administered by the teachers on duty (86.4%), the class teachers (82.8 %), the subject teachers (82.4%), the deputy head teachers (80.8%), the head teachers (70.8%) and to some extent the prefects (12.8%). The findings seem to suggest that corporal punishment was a more preferred traditional method of maintaining discipline in school and is applied by everyone in authority at school including prefects.

#### 4.2 Forms of corporal punishment used at school

The teachers were asked to list the various forms of corporal punishment that they administered on pupils at school.

Similarly, the pupils were asked to list the various forms of corporal punishment that they experienced at school. Data obtained from the teachers revealed that the various forms of corporal punishment that teachers used at school included: caning (31.7%), making the children to kneel down (26.7%), pinching (16.7%), physical tasks (10%), and slapping the pupils (8.3%). Data obtained from the students is summarized on table 2.

**Table 2: Forms of punishment that pupils undergo at school**

Type of punishment	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Canning	240	96.0
Slapping	228	91.2
Kneeling down	225	90.0
Pinching	195	78.0
Pulling hair/ears	179	71.6
Forced manual work	177	70.8
Standing in sun for long periods	105	42.0
Being shaken or being thrown around	99	39.6
Kicking	92	36.8

The pupils reported canning (96%), slapping (91.2%), kneeling down (90%), pinching (78%), pulling hair/ears (71.6%) and forced manual work (70.8%) as the most prevalent forms of corporal punishment used at school. Kicking (36.8%), being shaken or being thrown around (39.6%) and standing in the sun for long periods (42%) were the least used.

#### 4.3 Views of headteachers, teachers, and pupils on use of corporal punishment in schools

To establish teachers' views on corporal punishment, the teachers were provided with predetermined responses which they were expected to indicate whether they 1) strongly agreed, 2) agreed, 3) undecided, 4) disagreed or 5) strongly disagreed with. The data obtained is summarized on table 3.

**Table 3: Teachers' views on use of corporal punishment at school**

Statement	n	1	2	3	4	5
Corporal punishment is necessary to maintain discipline in schools	60	55.0%	26.7%	13.3%	5.0%	
In the absence of corporal punishment, discipline has become worse in our school	60	41.7%	41.7%	5.0%	6.7%	5.0%
Corporal punishment should be reintroduced to deal with indiscipline in schools	60	46.7%	31.7%	6.7%	11.7%	3.3%
Children know that corporal punishment is not allowed and therefore they misbehave	60	41.7%	36.7%	5.0%	11.7%	5.0%
Other methods of maintaining discipline beside corporal punishment are ineffective	60	43.3%	31.7%	3.3%	11.7%	10.0%
Children look down on teachers since the ban on corporal punishment	60	43.3%	25.0%	6.7%	11.7%	13.3%
Corporal punishment helps in character building in pupils	60	38.3%	28.3%	6.7%	16.7%	10.0%
Corporal punishment is the most effective way of maintaining discipline in schools	60	31.7%	23.3%	5.0%	25.0%	15.0%
Corporal punishment teaches the learner to respect the teacher	60	18.3%	28.3%	10.0%	26.7%	16.7%
In the absence of corporal punishment, the teacher has no authority over the pupils	60	21.7%	26.7%	1.7%	33.3%	16.7%
I need to instill fear into children for them to learn	60	6.7%	25.0%	1.7%	30.0%	36.7%

Data presented on table 3 show that majority of the teachers (81.7%) agreed that corporal punishment is necessary to maintain discipline in schools. Moreover, a huge percentage of teachers (83.4%) felt that in the absence of corporal punishment, discipline had deteriorated in schools. It is therefore not surprising that 78.4% of the teachers felt that corporal punishment should be reintroduced to deal with indiscipline in schools. Apparently, 78.4% of the teachers were of the opinion that pupils know that corporal punishment is not allowed at school and therefore they misbehave.

Sixty eight point three percent (68.3%) reported that pupils looked down upon their teachers in the absence of corporal punishment. The teachers (75%) were apprehensive that other methods of maintain discipline in school were ineffective. The data presents a major discrepancy between the MOE policy on discipline management strategies in schools and the reality in schools. Majority (75%) of the teachers appear unprepared to abandon the use of corporal punishment in school largely because they feel that alternative strategies are not working. This may point to teacher lack of training on adoption of innovative discipline management strategies at school.

#### 4.4 Head teachers’ views on corporal punishment

The head teachers were asked to provide their opinion on the use of corporal punishment in school. Seven head teachers (70%) reported that use of corporal punishment had been in use in schools for long. Corporal punishment is therefore part of school culture in Kenya. Six head teachers (60%) were of the opinion that corporal punishment was easy and quick to apply. Six head teachers (60%) were of the opinion that corporal punishment instills good morals. Five head teachers (50%) felt that corporal punishment helps in molding good behaviour while. The findings seemed to suggest that the head teachers held a strong belief and regard for corporal punishment. This may explain lack of compliance with the government directive on the ban of corporal punishment. Contrary to Johnson (2004) assertion that teachers often administer corporal punishment without the knowledge of the headmaster, the study found out that headteachers are indeed perpetrators of corporal punishment in schools.

#### 4.5 Whether the Ministry of Education should lift ban on corporal punishment in schools

The headteachers, teachers, and pupils were asked whether the MOE should lift ban on corporal punishment shin schools. The data obtained is summarized on table 4.

**Table 4: Whether ban on corporal punishment should be lifted**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Headteachers</b>	70%	30%	<b>100</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	82%	18%	<b>100</b>
<b>Pupils</b>	60%	40%	<b>100</b>

From the findings, it was evident that majority of the headteachers (70%), teachers (82%), and pupils (60%) wanted the MOE to lift the ban on corporal punishment in schools. This implies that the key persons at school level (headteacher, teachers, and pupils) had a different opinion on the ban from that of the government. They were therefore not likely to feel obliged to comply with the directive. The government needed to have consulted with the major stakeholders in the formulation of the policy on the ban. Gladwell (1999) notes that consultation with regard to abolition of corporal punishment excluded teachers.

The findings further imply that teachers were not adequately prepared to maintain discipline at school without the use of corporal punishment leading to despair on discipline management (Gladwell, 1999). The despair was mainly attributed to the disruptive behaviour of pupils and the perception among the teachers that their authority had been taken away. It is therefore not surprising that headteachers were of the opinion that corporal punishment was easy and quick to apply (Kubeka, 2004), that the use of corporal punishment had been in use in schools for so long (Porteus & Vally, 2001), that corporal punishment helped in molding good behaviour, and that corporal punishment instilled good morals (Ayalew, 1996). Strong belief on corporal punishment by headteachers also points to failure of MOE to change the attitude of school leadership towards corporal punishment. The data also seemed to suggest that that corporal punishment is accepted by the society. This is due to the fact that even the pupils (60%) on whom it was inflicted supported its re-introduction. According to KAACR (2007), child discipline practices founded on physical punishment can still be found “strewn” almost all over the world. KAACR (2007) further notes that in Kenyan schools, corporal punishment has a high degree of culture acceptance and approval.

#### 5. Conclusions

The study concluded that headteachers and teachers and to some extent, the school prefects, continue to use corporal punishment irrespective of the ban. Pupils continue being subjected to corporal punishment as a corrective mechanism for unwanted behaviour.

Prevalent among the forms of corporal punishment are canning, slapping, pulling of ears/hair, and making the pupils to kneel down. School administrators, teachers, and pupils perceive corporal punishment as part of school ethos and culture. The head teachers who are expected to implement the ban on corporal punishment still hold perceptions that corporal punishment moulds good behaviour and instills good morals. Such perceptions have been surpassed by changing global trends in the context of children rights and safe schools. The study also concludes that teachers are not thoroughly prepared to deal with indiscipline in the absence of corporal punishment. It is also possible that teacher training institutions are not adequately preparing teachers to deal with emerging discipline issues in the absence of corporal punishment. Further, the MOE may not be providing opportunities for the teachers to pursue in-service training on alternative strategies of maintaining discipline in schools.

## 6. Recommendations

The study recommends that MOE should train head teachers and teachers on alternative strategies to deal with discipline problems other than use of corporal punishment. The training is necessary because child abuse has negative developmental effects on the child. There is also need for routine inspection of school by quality assurance and standards officers to ensure that ban on corporal punishment in schools is enforced. There is also need to evaluate guidance and counseling in schools for purposes of continuous improvement.

## References

- Ajowi, J. & Simatw, E. (2010). The role of guidance and counseling in promoting student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya: A case study of Kisumu district. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 5(5): 263-272
- Ayalew, S. (1996). *School discipline and corporal punishment in Ethiopian schools*. Addis Ababa: AAU Press.
- Chamberlain, L. (1996). Classroom discipline: *The teacher, the bully and a smack*. APT comment, 2, 17.
- Dietz, T. L. (2000). Disciplining children: Characteristics associated with the use of Corporal Punishment. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 24(12): 1529-1542.
- Gershoff, E. T. (2002). Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviours and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*. 128(4): 590-595.
- Gladwell, A. (1999). *A survey of teachers' attitudes towards corporal punishment after the abolishment of corporal punishment*. (unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Western Cape: Bellville.
- Human Rights Watch. (1999). *Spare the child: Corporal punishment in Kenyan School*. Retrieved 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011 from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45d1adbc2.html>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2008). Kenya: Government should end all corporal punishment, Retrieved on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012 from <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/09/22/financials>
- Johnston, T. (2004). Gender Series: The abuse of Nairobi school children, Nairobi: Population Communication Africa, in O'Sullivan, M. (2005), Corporal punishment in Kenya, *Juvenile Justice Quarterly*, 2, 1.
- KAACR, (2007). *An assessment of corporal punishment in schools*. A Research report by the Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children. Nairobi: Kenya.
- Kindiki, J. N. (2009). Effectiveness of communication on students discipline in secondary schools in Kenya. *Educational Research and Review*, 4 (5): 252-259.
- Kubeka, W. M. (2004). *Disciplinary measures at the Moduopo primary school in Tembisa*, Gauteng Province, South Africa after 1994. (Unpublished MTech dissertation). Pretoria: Tshwane University of Technology.
- Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Republic of Kenya(MOEST). (2005). Kenya Educational Sector Support Programme 2005- 2010: *Delivering Quality Education and Training to all Kenyans*. Nairobi. MOEST.
- Porteus, K., & Vally, L. (2001). *Alternatives to Corporal Punishment: Growing discipline and respect in our classroom*. Heinemann: Johannesburg.
- Rosen, L. (1997). *School discipline: Best practices for administrators*. California: Corwin Press.
- Songul, K. (2009). Teachers' Perceptions on Corporal Punishment as a Method of Discipline in Elementary Schools. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 2 (8): 242-251.
- UNESCO. (2001). *Monitoring report on education for all 2001*. Retrieved 08<sup>th</sup> September 2011 from [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/monitoring/monitoring\\_rep\\_contents.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/monitoring/monitoring_rep_contents.shtml)
- Cicognani, L. (2004). To Punish or Discipline? Teachers' Attitudes towards the Abolition of Corporal Punishment. A research report submitted to the School of Human and Community Development, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology). Accessed 9th March 2012 from <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/175/Dissertation.pdf?sequence=1>