

## **Implications of Corporal Punishment on the Child's Mental Health in Peshawar, Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Corporal punishment is a common phenomenon in the lives of children in Pakistan due to religious, cultural and legal support. The association between corporal punishment and its psychological impacts on child has been studied around the globe but it had not received the due attention of academicians, researchers and professionals in Pakistan. This paper aims to fill this gap between theory and practice of corporal punishment and to highlight the psychological impacts of corporal punishment due to its practice as the perpetrators are unaware of its negative consequences. In order to have in-depth understanding of psychological impacts of corporal punishment on children child psychologists were chosen for sample in Peshawar, Pakistan. The study was qualitative in nature adopting purposive sampling technique for sample selection. Data was collected through in-depth interviews while data was analysed through discourse analysis method based on Gee (1999) model of *Semiotic building, World building, Activity building, Socioculturally-situated identity and relationship building, Political building and Connection building*. The study finds that corporal punishment having negative impacts on child emotions, increase aggression, poor cognitive development, depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, spoils creativity and concentration and hamper the child socialization process. These impacts further lead to poor academics which in turn causes school drop outs. The study recommended that teacher's trainings on alternative methods of behaviour modification, proper complaint mechanism and accountability, mass awareness, proper legislation, government interest and appointing psychologists and social workers will be beneficial for dealing with the issue of corporal punishment in schools of Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Corporal Punishment, Children, School, Academics, Behaviour, Pakistan.

### **Introduction**

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Pakistan is confronted with numerous issues in which the educational problem is of utmost priority. The high rate of illiteracy in the country can be linked with lack of access to schools, inappropriate educational facilities, unemployment, poverty and the negative role played by the religious scholars. The practice of corporal punishment can also be linked with the increase in school drop outs (Government of Pakistan, 2013). In Pakistan 7.5 million while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 2.5 million children aged 5-16 are out of the school. The factors which are responsible for this situation are the lack of parental interest in child education, child own motivation, inactive parent-teacher relationship, financial issues and the practice of corporal punishment in schools (Alif Ailaan, 2014). Straus and Donnelly (2005: 3) defined corporal punishment as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correcting or controlling the child’s behaviour”. Currently in Pakistan the practice of corporal punishment in schools is a highly notorious and debated phenomenon due to its coercive nature and negative impacts on the child personality and academic performance (UNICEF, 2001). Andrew and Stewart (2002) stated that corporal punishment is mainly used to make the children as socialized and disciplined as the purpose of every society is to make its citizen as contributing and functional as per the customs and law of the country. However, the practice of corporal punishment remained a debated phenomenon among the academicians, researchers and human rights activists due to its coercive nature and having negative impacts on child socialization and personality development. On the other side of the coin the supporters of its practice believe that it is beneficial for maintaining discipline, obedience and respect (UNICEF, 2015).

In South Asian countries, the practice of corporal punishment is due to poor academic performance and achieving the academic goals while in West it is practiced due to not following the school and social norms (Tiwari, 2013). Save the Children (2010) reported that understanding teachers perception about corporal punishment is very important as it’s not the child behavior but the teacher’s perception leads to the practice of corporal punishment in schools while UNICEF (2001) reported that its practice is considered as an essential component for child academic achievements and learning in schools. Durrant (2005) reported that the teacher educational background plays a vital role in the practice of corporal punishment as the teacher is unable to convey the teachings methods in a proper and beneficial way to the children. Lack of accountability and overcrowded classes, insufficient infrastructure, teachers own stress and frustration and poor-quality teachings tools also boosted the practice of corporal punishment at school level (UNICEF, 2001). Culture acceptability for its practice is the most

contributing factor for corporal punishment and its practice is severe in those areas where people perceive it as a normal phenomenon (Salazar *et al.*, 2014). Religious support for corporal punishment also remained throughout the history and teachers and parents who are more religious do practice it for child behavior correction and modification as they consider it as an 'important culture distinction' (Menard, 2013).

### **Literature Review**

Since the last hundred years the practice of corporal punishment was examined with respect to its negative impacts on the children and maintaining the discipline however in the last three decades its practice is mainly linked with the negative impacts on child personality development and socialization (Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007; Ateah & Durrant, 2005). The main purpose of corporal punishment is to minimize the anti-social and increase the occurrence of desirable behaviors however the practice of corporal punishment results in an opposite way. A meta-analysis of 27 studies found a strong negative relationship between corporal punishment and occurrence of desirable behaviors (Straus *et al.*, 1997; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Gershoff, 2002). The practice of corporal punishment can also lead to physical abuse if its practice is irrational and inappropriate (Block, 2013 and Taylor *et al.*, 2011).

The psychological impacts of corporal punishment are more severe as compared to the physical. Aggression is mostly studied in relation with corporal punishment but the meta-analysis of Gershoff (2002) reported that more a child is punished more the child will become aggressive. Turner and Finkelhor (1996) reported that corporal punishment develops the feelings of depression and feelings of hopelessness which continuous throughout the adulthood. Corporal punishment also slower the cognitive development process in children. This situation leads to the poor academic performance which in return causes school drop outs (Save the Children, 2005).

Holden and Ashraf (2016) reported that in Pakistan the practice of corporal punishment can lead to poor academic performance. Those students who receive it regularly or more severely usually do not come to school which alternatively become school drop outs. They also added that its practice promotes the 'culture of violence' as the children start considering its practice as legitimate and they start using it for resolving issues in later life (Graziano, 1994). Besides of its negative impacts on children corporal punishment still receive the support of legal, educational and religious doctrine. Its practice in school is based on the philosophies of child discipline and rearing (Lwo & Yuan, 2011).

Baumrind *et al.*, (2002) reported that its practice is necessary for maintaining school discipline and making the child obedient, respected and disciplined.

Corporal punishment is a routine phenomenon in the lives of Pakistani children but unfortunately no official data base is available for reporting such cases (Holden & Ashraf, 2016). Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (2015) reported that Pakistan is amongst those 50 states where the practice of corporal punishment is traditionally, culturally and legally (see section 89 of PPC) acceptable. The Government of Pakistan passed the 'Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill 2014' from the National Assembly but unable to implement it properly as it contradicts with section 89<sup>3</sup> of Pakistan Penal Code. The Child Protection and Welfare Act (2010) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bans corporal punishment but due to section 89 of PPC it is still not implemented properly (SPARC, 2016 and Holden and Ashraf, 2016).

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on attachment theory of John Bowlby (1969). This theory states that all human beings develop an attachment relationship with other human beings for the purpose of support, care and comfort. These relationships may not only be physical or material but also psychological and emotional (Wilkins, 2016). The theory further states that early positive attachment provides comfort and protection to the child while on the other hand negative or insecure attachment leads to develop psychological problems in the children (Walsh *et al.*, 2008). Till date numerous studies have reported that insecure attachment leads to stress, poor cognitive development, behavioral problems and psychopathology (Cyr *et al.*, 2010).

Applying attachment theory to education is based on the philosophy that secure attachment between the teachers and the students will lead to achieving the

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<sup>3</sup> Act done in good faith for benefit of child or insane person, by or by consent of guardian: Nothing which is done in good faith for the benefit of a person under 12 years of age, or of unsound mind, or by consent, either expressed or implied, of the guardian or other person having lawful charge of that person, is an offence by reason of any harm which it may cause, or be intended by the doer to cause or be known by the doer to be likely to cause to that person: Provided First: That this exception shall not extend to the intentional causing of death, or to the attempting to cause death; Secondly: That this exception shall not extend to the doing of anything which the person doing it knows to be likely to cause death, for any purpose other than the preventing of death or grievous hurt; or the curing of any grievous disease or infirmity; Thirdly: That this exception shall not extend to the voluntary causing of grievous hurt, or to the attempting to cause grievous hurt, unless it be for the purpose of preventing death or grievous hurt, or the curing of any grievous disease or infirmity; Fourthly: That this exception shall not extend to the abetment of any offence, to the committing of which offence it would not extend.

academic goals while on the other hand insecure attachment creates psychological problems for the children which alternatively causes poor academic performance. The practice of corporal punishment is a threat to secure attachment and causes insecure attachment between the teacher and the student.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act (2010) bans the practice of corporal punishment in schools but unfortunately this act fails to achieve this goal due to various socio-economic, cultural and religious factors. This study will highlight the psychological impacts of corporal punishment through the discourse of child psychologists which is important in order to understand these impacts in detail. How psychologists perceive this phenomenon is important as schools play a vital role in the socialization of a child and through this study directions for future plans will be highlighted. The main aims and objectives of the study are to understand about the psychological and sociological impacts of corporal punishment on children in schools. The study will also highlight the impacts of corporal punishment on the academic performance of the children. Furthermore, the study also aims at providing research-based policy recommendations on the elimination or minimization of corporal punishment in schools of Peshawar, Pakistan.

### **Significance of the Study**

Sociologically educational institution plays key role in child character building and personality development. On the other hand, the practice of corporal punishment at school level is a threat to child physical and mental health. Its practice also leads to develop negative relationships between the teacher and the child which in turn causes lack of motivation towards the learning and school which later leads to school drop outs. This study aims to understand the psychological impacts of corporal punishment on children and provide research-based policy recommendations for the elimination of corporal punishment in schools of Peshawar, Pakistan.

### **Methods and Materials**

District Peshawar was selected as a universe of the study as it is the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and having a rich history around the world besides this 104 cases of corporal punishment was also registered with the child protection units after the Child Protection and Welfare Act (2010) while the population of the study were the child psychologists working with the children in Peshawar. The study was qualitative in nature as these types of studies are

becoming more important in social researches (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and as these studies aim to understand and explore social behaviors in detail (Avis, 2005). The study was based on cross-sectional research design as the researcher wants to gain the data from different people in a short period of time (Shaffer, 2009).

Levin and Fox (2006) stated that it is impossible in social research to collect the data from whole of the population due to which the researcher studies a small portion of the population known as sample and the findings of which are generalized on the whole of the population. The sample selection will be based on purposive sampling technique as the researcher is truly aware of the culture values and the sample which he/she selects based on own knowledge and experience is the most suitable one (Babbie, 2006). For selecting the sample size in qualitative studies no such rules are available it mainly depends on the research objectives and researcher choice (Burmeister and Aitken, 2012). The sample size of this study was ten child psychologists working in the field of child protection in Peshawar, Pakistan. This study will help to develop strategy to create awareness among local people about the mental health issue related to the practice of corporal punishment and will provide research based policy recommendations for its elimination.

The data was collected through in-depth interviews as it is the main method for data collection in qualitative studies and rich information can be obtained easily and quickly with this method (Legard *et al.*, 2003 and Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Data was analyzed through discourse analysis method by adopting the Gee (1999) model of *Semiotic building*, *World building*, *Activity building*, *Socioculturally-situated identity and relationship building*, *Political building* and *Connection building* as it is the most suitable method for data analysis if the issue is not properly addressed and a fruitful intervention is required (Smith and Firth, 2011). The findings are not generalizable on the whole of Pakistan but cover some areas in the rest of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Children were excluded from the sample on the basis that expert opinion was required for the elimination of corporal punishment and in-depth understanding about the psychological impacts of corporal punishment on children.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

With respect to attitude towards the support or nonsupport of corporal punishment a participant (P-07) stated:

[Well corporal punishment is the use of *physical force* to *correct* or *modify* the *wrong doings* of a child. Personally, I *support* its practice up to some extent for

*modifying* the child *behavior* and achieving the *academic goals* but if all other measures fail to achieve these goals]

This participant was found supportive to the practice of corporal punishment for the purpose of behavior modification and achieving the academic goals but on the condition if all other measures fail in achieving these desired goals. On the causative factors responsible for the practice of corporal punishment another participant (P-04) stated;

[Well frankly speaking the ratio of *poverty* is very high and the classes are also *over crowded* which leads to the practice of corporal punishment. Besides this *teacher's expectations* from children, *teacher's inefficiency*, lack of *understanding of child behavior*, lack of *parental interest* in child education, no in-service *trainings* for teachers on alternative methods, *teacher's perception* about its practice, *legal support* and lack of *accountability* are some of the major factors which leads to the practice of corporal punishment in our society]

The participant clearly linked the practice of corporal punishment with poverty, overcrowded classes, teacher's expectations, inefficiency of teachers, parental interest in child education, teachers lack of understanding of child behavior, no trainings for teachers on alternative methods of behavior modification, teachers perception about its practice, lack of accountability and legal support in our society.

Some of the participants linked its practice with maintaining school discipline and achieving the academic goals as a participant (P-01) stated;

[Well in my view the practice of corporal punishment is sometimes *beneficial* for maintaining the school *discipline* while on the other hand in some cases its practice is also *beneficial* for achieving the *academic goals*, but it mainly depends on *extent* and *nature* of punishment]

This is a common myth in Pakistan that corporal punishment is regarded as beneficial for school discipline and academic purposes and due to which the teachers do practice it and the parents do support it without knowing its negative impacts on the children personality development. In this context when a participant (P-02) presented a detailed picture of its impacts on children she stated; [The impacts of corporal punishment on children are numerous. Its practice has negative impacts on children *emotions*, it lowers the *self-esteem*, develops *fear* and lack of *confidence*. Well frankly speaking if a child is *emotionally* and *mentally* disturbed then it is impossible that the child may show positive performance in the *academics* and this situation further leads to the school *drop outs*. Its practice also develops disorganized attachment between the child and the teacher which in turn having negative impacts on the child *socialization* process]

The participant clearly linked corporal punishment and its negative impacts with child academic performance and child socialization process but unfortunately most of the people in Pakistan are unaware of these impacts and they still consider it beneficial for child discipline and academic performance. In addition, another participant (P-03) stated;

[Well in my view the practice of corporal punishment develops the feeling of *aggression* in children besides this it has negative impacts on *cognitive development, expression* and *creativity*. Due to the practice of corporal punishment the child is unable to hold strong *social relationships* which on the other side of the coin creates *power dynamics* in the society]

The participant precisely reported that the practice of corporal punishment hampers the cognitive development process of the child. The child is also unable to hold strong social relationships due to which it creates power dynamics in the society. In continuation to this another participant (P-04) stated;

[Personally, I believe that the practice of corporal punishment having negative impacts on the child *socialization* as the child loose the power of *concentration* and *attention*. In later stages it makes the child personality as *dependent*]

The participant links the practice of corporal punishment with child dependent personalities while another participant (P-06) stated;

[Well people believe that corporal punishment is beneficial for *academic achievements* but in reality, it had negative impacts on child *academic performance* besides this it also promotes the *culture of violence* as the child start considering it as a *legitimate* way of dealing with an issue]

In relation with the secure and insecure attachment a participant (P-05) stated;

[Well in my view its leads to *insecure attachment* as the students *hate* those teachers from whom they receive the corporal punishment which on the other hand leads to *poor academic* performance and school *drop outs*]

The association between corporal punishment and poor academic performance was highlighted by the participant besides this the participant also highlighted that its practice promotes the culture of violence in the long run. On the question about legislative measures about corporal punishment a participant (P-05) stated;

[Actually, our government do not have any *interest* in the child related issues due to our *political* system besides this our *cultural* and religious factors also play a vital role in this regard]

The participant highlighted the government interest and different culture perspectives including religious and cultural responsible for not having proper legislation on corporal punishment. On the abolishment of corporal punishment from school a participant (P-08) suggested;



[Well the government need to appoint *psychologist* and *social workers* to deal with the child behavior problems besides this teachers should also be provided trainings on the *alternative methods* of behavior modification]

The participant clearly suggested that appointing psychologist and social workers will be helpful in dealing with the child related issues along with providing training to the teachers on alternative methods of behavior modification and correction.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

In Pakistan more than 7.5 million children are out of school while the ratio of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 2.5 million. The practice of corporal punishment is responsible for this situation along with numerous other factors. Corporal punishment received the support of religious, cultural and traditional factors along with poverty, unemployment, teacher's incompetency and no legal framework for its abolishment. Previous studies reported that the practice of corporal punishment is associated with physical abuse, increase aggression, anti-social personality disorder, poor cognitive development and academic performance and promoting the culture of violence.

This study concluded that the practice of corporal punishment does have the support of people up to some extent for academic purposes and disciplining the child. The study also concluded poverty, overcrowded classes, teacher's expectations from the students, teacher's inefficiency, teachers lack of understanding of child behaviour, parental interest in child education, no in-service trainings for the teachers on alternative methods of behaviour modification, no accountability mechanism and legal support are some of the main factors responsible for its practice.

Psychologically the practice of corporal punishment having negative impacts on child emotions, increase aggression, develop fear and lack of confidence, depression, creativity, lower self-esteem, poor academics, school drop-outs, social relationships and socialization process. The study further concluded that the government interest, culture, legal and religious support are responsible for its practice in Pakistan.

In order to deal with the issue of corporal punishment the teachers should be provided proper trainings on the alternative methods of behavior modification, opening of a proper complaint mechanism and accountability, government interest in child rights and protection, mass awareness among local masses and appointing psychologists and social workers will be beneficial to abolish corporal punishment from schools of Pakistan.

### **Author(s) Declaration**

The author(s) declare no potential conflict of interest.

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