

**Save the Children Norway**  
**PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT AT SCHOOL: A STUDY**  
**(SUMMARY)**

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**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Nepalese society has been taking physical punishment of children at school very lightly. The practice of subjecting the schoolchildren to physical punishment is still common in Nepal as well as in other countries. These countries still believe that physical punishment makes the schoolchildren submissive to authorities and disciplined.

Many parents don't even bother to think that there are alternatives to apply in place of physical punishment to make the kids disciplined or correct them. They do not have second thoughts about the age-old practice. There are numerous instances where parents have encouraged the teachers to use corporal punishment in school to reform their children's manners.

Parents and teachers are allowed to administer physical punishment to their children without being liable for damages or a criminal conviction for assault. This has greatly hampered in developing an alternative measure other than the use of physical force to reform the children's manner.

In many developed countries, violent form of corporal punishment has been abolished. But in the developing countries like Nepal, the use of corporal or physical punishment to children continues unabated. Subjecting disciplinary measures to kids in Nepal is a common thing, be it at home or in schools. Sometimes, parents themselves persuade the teachers to administer punishment to their unruly children in the hope getting them corrected and disciplined.

It has been more than a decade since child rights movement began to spread its tentacles in Nepal and increasing the awareness level. Yet, despite the increased sensitivity to child abuse in the country and growing debate against child abuse and on child rights, it has failed to bolster the movement for abolishing

the corporal punishment of schoolchildren. Schools should not be in the business of hitting children, nor the parents and teachers.

The practice of corporal punishment may temporarily reform a student's bad manner, but in the long run, it merely teaches violence. Nepali society and schools have been taking this lesson very lightly. Instead, they believe in the opposite: That punishment reforms a student's bad manner or makes him/her cultured.

Many parents have not even bothered to ponder over the alternatives to corporal punishment. There are numerous instances where parents themselves have encouraged teachers to paddling their children at schools in the hope of making them well disciplined or bringing about a good moral behavior. This has made it impossible for thinking about an alternative over non-violent form of punishment.

Whether the children are at school or at home, corporal punishment against them is abuse of power on the part of the abusers or the elders whether they are teachers or the authority at home. It is a use of force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, which cannot be justified on any ground.

Corporal punishment, especially by hitting is a deliberate one, which inflicts bodily pain or injure for disapproved behavior and is a form of violence against the children. It includes: spanking, slaps on the face, hitting on the backs, hitting with a stick, punching with fist, kicking, pricking, shuddering, and dragging, among others.

This kind of physical punishment only helps to develop a negative attitude among the children and not promote their safe and healthy development. There are ample evidences to show that physical punishment has harmful effects, which reduces a child's self-confidence, self-control and self-respect thereby creating misunderstanding and dissatisfaction.

## **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AT SCHOOL: NEPAL**

Like in some other countries, corporal punishment of children at school in Nepal is not a new thing. It is deeply rooted in the tradition. There is no special law in the country calling for a ban on corporal punishment. An act on children promulgated in the country in 2048 BS has instead exempted the parents, family members and teachers from scolding the children or using other mild forms of punishment.

Article 39 of the Act related to children (1992) has authorized the chief of the child welfare homes to use mild form of punishment if the children were found to be unruly or undisciplined. But this act does not authorize him to subject the children to physical punishment, lock them up in room or deprive them of food and drinking water.

Though this act has prohibited the use of corporal and other violent form of behavior against the children, it has justified the use of force by the guardians and teachers by way of correction toward a pupil or child.

Though on the papers, many private and boarding schools in the Kathmandu Valley have banned the use of physical punishment of school children, in practice, the use of corporal punishment and stringent disciplinary measures against the child is common.

The practice of corporal punishment is more common in government-aided schools in Nepal. There is a general belief among the schoolteachers that children become disciplined through bodily punishment and that there is no better option than this to mould a child's behavior.

Study shows that incidences of stringent punishment of children in Nepalese schools are on the rise. The schools' custodians consider the punishment "reasonable" for "correction". But no two schools practice same kind of punishment. This shows that every school or every teacher is at the helm of affairs when it comes to inflicting injury or abusing a child physically and that there is no mechanism to curb the practice.

Children often meet with corporal punishment in schools for not doing homework, breaking the school rules, becoming disorderly, not respecting the teachers and for a variety of reasons.

Once a student is accused of one of these things, he/she is often insulted or demoralized in class and sometimes even slapped on the face or hit hard with sticks by the teachers or headmaster. This kind of behavior against the children is common in a huge majority of schools in Nepal.

According to a published report, from January 2003 to June 2004, at least 203 students met with harsh physical punishment in schools in the name of "correction" of their manners. In 2002, there were only 66 students who met with similar punishment at schools. It thus, becomes clear that incidences of abuse of children are rising phenomenally.

Study and evidences make it clear that physical punishment is a violation of children's rights. The impact of physical punishment in school is even more serious thing here.

In this context, and especially with regard to the punishment, especially the physical punishment meted out to children in schools, this study which is commissioned by the Hatemalo Sanchar with the support from children at child clubs, wanted to explore the following key questions: How has the physical punishment in schools been affecting a child's psychological, emotional and physical development? What are the opinions of teachers and students with regard to physical punishment? How can we find alternative to physical punishment?

## **PROCEDURE**

Facilitated by the adults, this study was undertaken by Hatemalo Child Club. While discussing on the issues of child rights, members of the child clubs raised the problems of children, especially corporal punishment at school seriously. While analyzing the issues of corporal punishment, which is used on educational and disciplinary grounds at schools, it has been felt that voices against the same were to be raised. Thus, a concept has been developed in which it was felt that a study was to be carried out on this issue.

In the following chart, children have expressed their willingness and committed to effective participation in the various stages of the study to be undertaken.

S/No	Stages of the study	Areas for child participation	Areas for facilitators' participation
01	Resource materials study	Collection and study of resources and materials related to physical punishment	Collection and study of resources and materials related to physical punishment
02	Study write-up	Group discussion on the materials studied and write on them as much as one can write	Organizing group discussion on materials studied and writing quality stories
03	Designing the study	Becoming clear on how to design the study, setting procedures on selecting the study area and target groups	Discussions on designing the study and providing feedback and recommendations
04	Preparing questionnaire	After having discussed on the resource materials and studying them, preparing the questionnaire as per the objectives of the study	Giving final shape to the questionnaire after discussing with the children and with necessary amendments
05	Field visits for the collection of statistics	Collecting statistics from the target schools	Assisting the children in their field visits
06	Analyzing statistics	Discussions on the collected data and assisting the facilitators to write the report	Preparing the draft report in organized manner
07	Dissemination of the report	On the first phase of the dissemination, the children will present the findings of the report amidst the gathering of school representatives with the objective of discouraging corporal punishment in schools	Publication of the final report and its dissemination

## OBJECTIVES

- General understanding of the punishment, especially the corporal punishment that take place in schools.
- Collecting the opinions of students and teachers on the issue of punishment

- Identifying positive and exemplary alternatives that are worth imitating by all in maintaining disciplinary standards at schools.
- Submitting the recommendations to concerned authorities

## **STUDY AREA**

For this study, five government-aided schools and five private schools were selected in the Kathmandu Valley and the survey was carried out.

## **STUDY FRAME**

This study was accomplished with the participation of children. The report has been prepared on the basis of the statistics collected by children in the survey. The collected statistics have been put in charts and analyzed using qualitative and descriptive procedures. The report is of investigative nature.

## **COLLECTION OF STATISTICS**

At least 100 students of 10 different schools studying in grades six, seven and eight were involved in the collection of statistics. Similarly, 30 male and female teachers working in those schools also collected statistics on the above subject. There were two different sets of questioners prepared for teachers and students for collecting the statistics.

## **RESULTS**

Following are the main arguments put forward in the questionnaire filled by respondents comprising some 100 students studying at sixth and eighth grades and their teachers. Some 30 teachers—both male and female—have also filled the questionnaire.

## **UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL CHILDREN ABOUT THE PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS:**

- In general, it was revealed by a majority of respondents who were students that by “punishment” they mean infliction of pain by a teacher or other educational official upon the body of a student and causing psychological distress as a result of misconduct.
- Most teachers hit students when they failed to do their homework, made noise in the classroom, and did not study. They also beat their pupils when latter refuse to carry out the orders and violate rules of the schools. There are also a variety of reasons why teachers use physical punishment. They include: coming late to school, remaining unfaithful to teachers, speaking rubbish, doing bad things, fighting with friends, not becoming attentive towards classroom instruction and not answering the questions asked by teachers.
- The study shows that a huge majority of students are subjected to punishment at schools. A majority of them were asked to catch their ears and sit up and down repeatedly as a penalty and were beaten or asked to act like a cock. They were also expelled from the classes, scolded, hit with a stick and duster, made to stand on the benches, got their ears and hairs pulled and were asked to fight with a friend.
- The study has shown that students suffered from back pain, sustained injuries, carried stick marks and swelling wherever they received the blows. As a result, they said they did not like to study and do homework. Some of them have also mentioned that due to punishment, they have increased their attention towards studies. Students also said that they felt shy in front of their friends and feared losing friends.

The study also shows that their friends who were not battered mocked at children battered by teachers. Some even refused to talk with them. With regard to the impact on teachers-students relationships, physical punishment discouraged the children to talk to their teachers, ask questions, turned angry at seeing them, and refused to listen to their lectures in the class. However, some students had their moral up to ask questions and interact with teachers after getting physical punishment.

- Most students felt bad and unhappy after having battered by their teachers in school. They felt humiliated and uncomfortable to face their friends. They lost their attention to studies. Students also felt depressed, angry, letdown, felt as if they were unsuccessful and were scared too.
- Students often promised not to repeat the mistakes once they receive blows from their teachers. They remained serious and angry and had even jerked with anger against their teachers. Study also shows that students asked for forgiveness, cry, lost interest in studies and felt like quitting school.

- Teachers cited that punishment was given mainly to "correct" students and said it could help students to build better future. Other reasons given by teachers for battering the students include: To show them right path, to make them concentrate in studies, to be punctual, to discourage them to make the classes noisy, and for becoming disobedient and disrespectful to teachers. Some said the corporal punishment was teachers' fault as they come moody from home and express their anger on the pupils.
- Most students said physical punishment was harmful to students and it could lead to emotional and psychological disorder so it was not desirable.
- Students said the corporal punishment could result in both negative and positive impacts on them.
- Study shows most students who were physically punished at schools revealed it first to their friends and then to their mother, brothers and sisters at home.
- Most students interviewed said there are better alternatives to physical punishment. Teachers should try for alternatives such as advising students, counseling them, treating their pupils in lovingly and encouraging them in their works however insignificant it may be.

## **2. OPINIONS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ON CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AT SCHOOLS**

- Teachers do not differ in their opinion about the corporal punishment at school. They say it is done in order to ensure that the students do not repeat their mistakes in future and remain in right track.
- A majority of teachers have punished the students on numerous instances
- Corporal or physical punishment is the most common form of punishment given by teachers to their pupils. It includes: Asking the students to hold their ears and sit up and down repeatedly as a penalty, beating with sticks, standing upright on benches, and making them run all over the school ground. Some of the mental torture include: Seeking forgiveness before their friends, scolding in abusive words, threatening, keeping them in lower grades and humiliating, and forcing them to dance before the classmates.
- Main objectives of subjecting students to these form of punishment as cited by teachers include: Correcting students to follow right path, discouraging them to repeat their mistakes in future and making them well-disciplined.

- Asked if those teachers who are battering the students now had received similar punishments when they were students, most of them said they were also subjected to one or the other form of corporal punishment during their schooldays.
- Study shows after punishing the pupils, teachers also felt regret about their behavior or their short temper later on. It could lead to emotional and physical problems.
- A majority of teachers said it was an effective means of discipline and should be continued.
- Some teachers said without corporal punishment or use of force, students could be disciplined and good educational environment created.
- Most teachers said the punishment had not only negative impact on a child but also had positive outcomes. They cited some examples how an unruly student could be made disciplined and cultured through punishment.
- A majority of teachers said they can try out alternatives to physical punishment. They said they were even trying alternatives at school and putting efforts at making them work.
- Study shows the use of corporal punishment in school has been debated both formally and informally between teachers, teachers and students and between guardians and teachers during teachers' day, school meeting, guardians' meeting and so on... During such meetings, some parents even authorized the use of physical force to their children but said their children should not be hampered in studies.
- As a measure to make schools free from corporal punishment and create a safe and healthy environment for innocent young children to learn, it has been pointed out that children should be disciplined from the very beginning, they should be provided with cheerful environment and have a close and cordial relations with their teachers.

Teachers should understand the problems of students and help them develop leadership qualities. Teachers should also concentrate on small activities that students do. If a student committed a mistake, a discussion should take place and experiences and lessons shared for correcting the mistake, said teachers.



## **DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Opinions of students and teachers on punishment**

Though a huge majority of teachers are against the use of rigorous form of punishment, they do not completely rule out some mild form of punishment.

They try to justify the use of force and believe that it brings the desired results. On the other hand, most students take punishment as infliction of bodily pain by their teachers or elders in the family. They have negative opinion about it but also cite some positive results.

Students think that they were punished because they were making mistakes. As a result, today's students are positive about physical punishment at schools.

Study shows today's teachers who paddle students were opposed to corporal punishment given to them when they were students. The study shows when compared to past students and teachers, today's teachers and students are increasingly becoming conscious. One of them is thinking about an alternative to corporal punishment.

## **STATE OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOL**

The study shows that almost all students have seen and heard the incidences of corporal punishment going on in their schools. Students say some form or the other, corporal punishment continues unabated in their school. They also said they were even beaten by teachers. The study has proven this in the course of its findings.

Punishment of students is continuing at schools rampantly. Study shows physical punishment is most widely prevalent at schools. This leads us to conclude that a huge majority of teachers use physical punishment. However, teachers have started thinking differently towards physical punishment in recent days when compared in the past. But still the corporal punishment is increasing, study shows. As a result of which study shows it was nothing strange for the children to think of punishment as inflicting bodily pain.

The study shows physical punishment is not only affecting the children but is bound to have negative impact on the teachers—the punishers as well. Most of the teachers who beat their pupils had regretted, felt uneasiness and were mentally distressed. Though the teachers had felt this, most of them say male and followed by female teachers are still punishing their pupils at schools, according to the study.

Thus, it is unlikely that we can morally ban corporal punishment in schools unless a law is enacted prohibiting the use of the same through force.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT PRACTICED IN SCHOOLS**

If at all we are interested at knowing what are the needs and aspirations of children and how can we protect the rights of the child, there is a need to find an alternative to physical punishment by both teachers and the students. On this ground, a majority of teachers say the state surely has the options. Thus, there is a hope that there is an alternative to corporal punishment and that this alternative will be incorporated into the education system.

It is stated that in order to have alternative measures for physical punishment, a school should have adequate educational materials, parenting education, effective role of parents towards schools' affairs, social awareness and responsibility on the parts of the different people as well as need for vocational and technical education.

Only after creating the above environment that the teachers are likely to stop the use of physical force in schools and use alternative measures over corporal punishment. Only then the teachers will start appreciating small works of the students and adopt highly interactive and participatory teaching-learning methodologies.

The study shows that if the teachers gave chances to students to correct their mistakes, use appropriate and up-to-date teaching materials, study child psychology and constantly show interest in extra curricular activities and provide encouragement and support to students, physical punishment will have no place in the school system. But it is also equally important that students also reciprocate in the same way the teachers do on them.

Students say that alternative to corporal punishment at schools is possible if their teachers observed toleration and neutrality, advice the students, love them and inform the mistakes committed by pupils to their parents.

It is also widely felt by students that certain practices such as obliging student to doing homework, confining them to stringent disciplinary measures and asking them not to repeat the same mistakes second time need to be relaxed. Instead, there has to be alternative approaches in its place such as giving the child a task or chore to do and helping them to carry out such tasks.

Creating an environment in which a student wholeheartedly and sincerely fulfills his own responsibility, can work as an alternative to punishment, the study shows.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR CONCERNED UNITS**

### **1. Reforming the acts and regulations related to children and education:**

The law should ban the use of punishment, especially the corporal punishment and enforce the acts and regulations prohibiting the use of physical force. It should give due respect to and implementation of the general convention on the rights of the child. Use of even "mild"

physical punishment should also be banned. If other students committed the mistakes, they will have to be dealt with non-violent measures. If possible, physical punishment should be banned and made illegal.

**2. Using alternative to punishment:**

It is better to bring up children using non-physical discipline methods. Teachers are main agents of change in this. A teacher has a great role to play to convert the schools' environment into a child-friendly and violence-free zone. Thus, it is important that in every school, teachers should be motivated from time to time to adopt an alternative to punishment. Giving information related to this and providing training is important. The government or the agencies under the Ministry of Education should be responsible for organizing such training. It is also important that only trained teachers are recruited in the schools.

**3. Form student groups in each school to supervise punishment at schools:**

In every school, how are children administered the punishment? What are the reasons for it? Were those students liable for such punishment? How can a pupil free himself from becoming the cause of punishment? What are the responsibilities and obligations of students? Should teachers be accountable towards children and parents for meeting out physical punishment? A children's group will be formed to discourage corporal punishment at schools and discuss the above issues. The group formed by schoolchildren will monitor the punishment administered by teachers on the students in school and stop the physical punishment for a while. Necessary rules would be made jointly by the students and schools to make the group effective. The group will launch the awareness campaign.

**4. Organizing programs for children's moral development:**

Organizing awareness program related to moral development of children in all the schools from time to time to make students self-disciplined, devoted at studies and also to ensure that they do not commit mistake. Raising the awareness of children on child rights issues and their responsibility.

**5. Awareness program for guardians:**

The study shows that parents have divergent opinions on subjecting children to physical punishment at schools. Children were administered such punishment at their schools, have failed to inform it to their parents. Parents, on the other hand, have induced the teachers to use physical punishment in the hope that it might help reforming their children. Thus, it becomes clear that parents should be well informed about child rights and negative impact of physical punishment and that non-violent alternative form of punishment is effective and possible.

**6. Efforts of the civil society:**

There has been increasing use of physical punishment in schools in way of disciplining or “correcting” students. The civil society has to admit it as a violation of child rights and identify it seriously. In order to create punishment-free schools and promote the rights of the child at schools, civil society has a big role to play. The civil society should work towards stopping those abuses against schoolchildren and help developing an alternative to punishment.

**CONCLUSION:**

Teachers must play central role in socializing the students no matter whether they do good or bad in schools. Teachers should be the guiding light, facilitators and a role model for every children.

But any negative attitude such as abuse of children by a teacher is bound to have serious repercussions on the healthy and normal development of children. Since physical punishment is violence, it is going to be implanted in their young minds for longtime to come and as they grow up, it will have negative impact on them.

Studies show that children will be motivated to take up violence if they were exposed to violence from the very young age. They will also get the negative message that violence is a must to mend the society or a disorderly person.

Though the physical punishment may yield some positive results initially, in the long run, it is going to have serious implications on the society and would be many times worse than what we can think of it now.

While we are involved in a campaign at making the school and its surroundings a violence-free zones through the slogans such as “Children are zones of peace!” “Make schools a peace zone!” teachers are battering the students inside the classes. What do we say about this violence? How can we then claim on the moral ground that other factors outside the schools are wrong when teachers themselves and school custodians are licensed to use the weapons of violence in schools? Children are experiencing and witnessing the violence routinely both in the schools and outside the school premises. What can they learn from their schools? Nothing, except violence. Using the weapons of violence, we are today teaching them the lessons how to become peace-loving and advocating that violence is bad thing. Isn’t it laughable?

Every nation envisages a vision for children, how it wants to see them in future through their national policy and plans. If Nepal has a dream like that to see today’s children growing up into fully developed responsible and peace-loving citizens of this country in future, it should act now.

THE END  
**4,552 words, total pages: 16**