



Perceptions of Teachers on the Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools: A Case of Kang Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Corporal punishment is the most common method used in Botswana schools to instil student discipline. This investigated the extent to which the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools are followed and the challenges hindering adherence to these rules and regulations. The study was conducted at Matsha Community College and Motaung Junior Secondary School in Botswana targeting all teachers at the two schools. Fifty-four (54) teachers from Matsha College and thirty-three (33) teachers from Motaung JSS participated in the study. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire and was analysed descriptively. The study found that teachers from the targeted schools adhered to the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment but there are challenges that hinder complete adherence. In view of the findings, the study recommends increased and continuous capacity building of teacher on the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools.

Keywords: Adherence, corporal punishment, education act.

Introduction

According to Dembo¹ punishment is the presentation of an unpleasant stimulus so that a bad behaviour will not recur. Corporal punishment is therefore viewed as any form of punishment that inflicts physical pain to deter the subject from repeating an undesirable behaviour. The forms of corporal punishment include and are not limited to the use of a stick, slapping, pinching and any other form leading to physical harm. (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children². These forms of punishment are banned by international laws and treaties like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some countries such as Norway, Namibia, South Africa and United States of America have passed domestic legislation that prohibits the use of corporal punishment in schools^{3,4}. According to Tafa⁵ corporal punishment was inherited with the colonially imposed authoritarian system of schooling.

The laws of Botswana allow the use of corporal punishment in the courts and schools respectively^{6,7}. The Education Act is as a guiding instrument for the administration of corporal punishment in schools and according to section 21 of the act, corporal punishment shall only be administered as the last resort. Despite the presence of the act, incidences of reckless use of corporal in school continue to be reported. Kelebonye⁸, reported that a seven-year old Mochudi pupil was hospitalised after a teacher allegedly whipped her with a hosepipe. Responding on the same issue some parents claimed that infliction of corporal punishment by some teachers is routine, arbitrary and often brutal⁸. According to Jotia and Boikhutso⁹, "corporal punishment in schools has turned into an act of

violence against children more so that the administration of such punishment is done haphazardly without following the stipulated rules and regulations". In another recent incident a male student at Ledumang Senior Secondary School retaliated by attacking a male teacher after corporal punishment was administered on him¹⁰. These newspaper reports and other unreported incidents show that inappropriate usage of corporal punishment exists in schools. This study therefore aims to investigate the extent to which the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools are adhered.

Statement of the problem: Although there are laid down rules and regulations that ought to be enforced, there is persistent inappropriate use of corporal punishment in schools^{9,11}. The extent to which these rules enforced remains a question for investigation. Anecdotal evidence from a reference group that the researchers consulted in preparation for this study suggests that there are challenges in adherence to rules and regulations associated with the administration of corporal punishment in schools. Garegae¹² also found that teachers feel that school rules and regulations for corporal punishment are problematic.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the views of teachers on the extent to which rules and regulations governing corporal punishment are enforced and identify associated challenges.

Significance of the study: The findings of this study are beneficial to students, teachers, policy makers and other stakeholders. The results can inform future policy direction concerning corporal punishment. The study also raises

awareness on whether teachers observe rules and regulations regarding the use of corporal punishment. Being aware of the rules and regulations will protect teachers against possible legal suits for inappropriate administration of corporal punishment. Observing rules and regulations regarding corporal punishment will also protect students from the associated physical and emotional abuse.

Literature Review: Legislation on the use of corporal punishment: The Education Act of 1967 guides the administration of corporal punishment in schools⁷. The Education Act of 1967 prescribes how corporal punishment should be administered, when and by whom. According to the act “corporal punishment shall be administered to a pupil only by (a) the headmaster; (b) a teacher or boarding master or matron or parent to whom authority to administer corporal punishment has been delegated by the headmaster; or (c) such other person as the Permanent Secretary may, in writing, in special circumstances, authorize”⁷). It further stipulates that corporal punishment shall be administered in the presence of another member of staff and a register kept. The act prescribes that a cane no more than one metre long and one centimetre thick should be used across the buttocks or on the palm of the hand. No male teacher except the School Head is allowed to cane a female student. These rules and regulations are similar to those used in Nigeria¹³ and Zimbabwe¹⁴.

Available literature reveals that even though there are prescribed rules and regulations governing corporal punishment in schools, they are rarely enforced. According to Tafa⁵ rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools are honoured more in breach than observance, records are poorly kept, punishment and offenses do not match, male teachers beat female students and there is inconsistency in the size of the cane which infringes the rules and regulations. Similar trends are witnessed elsewhere in the region. For instance, studies done by Shumba¹⁵ and Shumba et al¹⁶, found that teachers in Zimbabwe schools do not follow regulations when administering corporal punishment. They observe that teachers use unlawful forms of corporal punishment such as kicking and use of bare hands. According to Jotia and Boikhutso⁹, “Of late, cases of child abuse in schools have been rampant since teachers take the law into their hands by administering corporal punishment indiscriminately and without adhering to the rules of its implementation”. Studies by Garegae¹² and Okiemute¹³ found that teachers view the school corporal punishment regulations as problematic. Similarly, teachers in Nigeria feel that they are not empowered to be involved in the disciplinary process as they face discipline challenges in classrooms where the school head is not always nearby¹³. Baputaki¹⁷, also observed that School Heads are not always present to witness the administration of corporal punishment as required by rules and regulations.

Alternatives to corporal punishment: Pastoral policy: The aim of the policy is to promote the participation of students and

other stakeholders in the school governance. The key results area of the policy are to; “Improve school discipline; improve effectiveness and efficiency in leadership and management of schools; improve academic performance and increase stakeholder involvement”¹⁸.

Guidance and counselling programme: The aim of the Guidance and counselling programme is to promote the social, personal, educational and vocational development of students¹⁸. The guidance part focuses on nurturing good behaviour while the counselling part assists students to cope with life situation.

Child friendly school model: According to UNICEF¹⁹, Child Friendly School models represent pragmatic pathways towards quality in education that have evolved (and are still evolving), from the principle of education as a human right to a child-centred ideology that regards the best interest of the child as paramount at all times. This model aims to eliminate school, home or community factors that can prevent children to attend school. It promotes child participation and increases space for children to express their views and opinions and learn to follow school rules and regulations¹⁹.

Methodology

Research Design: Research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis¹¹. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design that endorses a quantitative approach to research.

Population and sampling: The study targeted all teachers at Matsha Community College and Motaung Junior Secondary School. It investigated the views of teachers because they are the ones who from time to time are delegated by the School Head to apply corporal punishment on students⁶. Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals (sample) from a population, preferably in such a way that the individuals are representative of the larger group from which they were selected²⁰. The study targeted all teachers at Matsha Community College and Motaung Junior Secondary School.

Instrumentation: The questionnaire used to collect data was divided into three parts. The first part collected demographic data of the respondents, the second parts contained close-ended questions with items drawn from the Education Act¹⁷, which stipulates the rules and regulations for corporal punishment in schools. The last part of the questionnaire comprised open-ended questions requesting respondents to suggest ways to enhance adherence to rules and regulations for corporal punishment in schools.

Validity and Reliability of the instrument: Validity deals with the ability of the instrument to measure what is supposed to measure. The questionnaire was tested for content and face validity by a team of experts from the Department of

Agriculture Economics, Education and Extension. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability is concerned with the consistency at which the questionnaire collected data. Specifically, Cronbach alpha formula was used to compute the reliability coefficient. The coefficient value of 0.82 was attained, indicating that the instrument was reliable²¹.

Data collection procedure and Ethical considerations: The researchers visited the schools and administered the questionnaire with the help of the heads of houses and staff development coordinator at Matsha College and Motaung JSS respectively. In total, 130 questionnaires were administered thus catering for all teachers at both schools.

A need to respect the participants and the sites for research is emphasised by Creswell¹¹. Creswell¹¹ further emphasises the importance of not putting participants at risk and respect of vulnerable populations. In this study, the researchers obtained a research permit from the Ministry of Education and Skills Development and asked participants to sign consent forms. Letters of introduction were written to individual participants informing them of the purpose of the study and its objectives. The participant's anonymity and confidentiality were also assured.

Data analysis and Interpretation: Data was analysed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The means and standard deviations generated from the six (6) point Likert scale were reported. A mean above 2.5 was used to denote agreement while a mean of 2.5 and below denoted disagreement with the statements provided. Open-ended questions were interpreted based on the meaning of the statement as picked the researchers and numbers were not a concern to the analysis²². The interpretation of the qualitative data was based on the research question and meaning of the statements.

Results and Discussion

The extent to which rules and regulations are followed: Table-1 above depicts views of teachers on adherence to rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment as practiced in their respective schools. The respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements, regarding the adherence to the rules and regulations guiding corporal punishment, on a four point Likert scale as follows: 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Agree), 4 (Strongly agree), 5 (not sure), 6 (Undecided). Generally the majority of the items in table 1 scored high ($\bar{x} > 2.5$), suggesting that teachers agreed that the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools are followed in the schools studied.

Table-1
Views of teachers on adherence to rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in their schools

Rules and regulations	N	Mean	SD	Not sure freq.	Undecided freq.
Corporal punishment is used as a last resort	82	2.89	1.12	3	2
Registers of corporal punishment are kept	74	2.76	1.07	13	-
Corporal punishment is moderate and reasonable in nature	87	3.38	0.72	-	-
Corporal punishment is administered across the buttocks.	84	3.38	0.78	2	1
Corporal punishment is applied on the palm of the hand.	81	3.04	0.97	-	6
Punishment should not exceed five strokes.	80	3.56	0.69	5	2
A light stick, about 1 m long and 1 cm thick is used	79	3.27	0.81	8	-
Teachers seek authority for the school head before administering corporal punishment.	79	2.61	1.15	8	-
School head is the only male teacher who applies corporal punishment on girls.	76	2.22	1.24	9	2
Corporal punishment is administered in the presences of a witness	79	2.68	1.12	8	-

Contrary to these findings, the study conducted by Tafa⁵ revealed that corporal punishment rules and regulations are not followed. Given that the study by Tafa was conducted in schools in the northern part of the country as compared to this study that targeted schools in South (Kang), may suggest that schools differ in adhering to rules and regulations governing corporal punishment. In his study that triangulated data collection methods, Tafa⁵ observed that canes came in all shapes, size, punishment exceeds five strokes, and records were either poorly kept or not kept at all in all the two schools studied. Interestingly, in agreement with the findings by Tafa⁵, Jotia and Boikhutso⁹ observed that corporal punishment is administered haphazardly without following the stipulated rules and regulations. Only one item in table-1 (school head is the only male teacher who applies corporal punishment on girls) was scored low ($\bar{x} = 2.22$), implying that male teachers apply corporal punishment on girls as well.

A considerable number of the respondents were either not sure or undecided in their response to some items. It may suggest that the information on the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools might not have reached some teachers in the studied schools. This is evidenced by the “not sure” response associated with the following items: registers of corporal punishment are kept (13), a light stick, about 1m long and 1 cm thick is used (8), teachers seek authority from the school head before administering corporal punishment (8) and school head is the only male teacher who applies corporal punishment on girls (9).

Possible challenges hindering enforcement of the corporal punishment rules and regulations: Table-2 depicts the responses of teachers on the possible challenges hindering adherence to rules and regulations governing the use of corporal

punishment by the teachers in schools. Generally, all the respondents agreed ($\bar{x} = 2.63$ to 3.38) that the following are the possible challenges hindering the enforcement of rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools: i. It is time consuming to administer corporal punishment according to rules and regulations. ii. School head is not always available to authorise administration of corporal punishment. iii. Records of incidences of corporal punishment are not kept. iv. Teachers are ignorant of the rules and regulations governing corporal punishment. v. Witnesses are not always present during incidences of corporal punishment. vi. Teachers feel disempowered by the rules and regulations governing corporal punishment and sometimes become emotional when administering corporal punishment to students.

These findings support the anecdotal evidence from a reference group consulted during the preparation for this study that revealed that time, availability of school head and witnesses, accessibility of record books and disempowerment of teachers are some of the challenges that hinder adherence to rules and regulations governing corporal punishment by teachers in schools.

In agreement to these findings, studies by Garegae¹² and Okiemute¹³ found that teachers view school discipline regulations as problematic. Garegae¹² further observed that, “Corporal punishment regulations say that only a school head or a designated individual can administer corporal punishment under strict adherence”. This put undue constraint on the capacity of the ordinary teacher to punish students using corporal punishment. Shumba¹⁴ also found that teachers who use corporal punishment in schools sometimes become emotional and end up taking the law into their hands.

Table-2
Response on challenges hindering adherence to rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment by the teachers

Challenges hindering adherence to rules and regulations	N	Mean	SD	Not sure freq.	Undecided freq.
It is time consuming to administer corporal punishment according to rules and regulations.	87	2.87	1.13	-	-
School head is not always available to authorise administration of corporal punishment.	77	3.30	0.90	6	4
Records of incidences of corporal punishment are not kept.	75	2.99	1.05	11	1
Teachers are ignorant of the rules and regulations governing corporal punishment.	80	2.63	1.14	7	-
Witnesses are not always present during incidences of corporal punishment.	79	3.11	1.03	7	1
Teachers feel disempowered by the rules and regulations governing corporal punishment.	81	3.38	0.80	3	3
Sometimes teachers become emotional when administering corporal punishment	76	3.24	1.03	11	-

SD = standard deviation

Suggestions to enhance adherence to rules and regulations:

The last section of the questionnaire solicited suggestions from the respondents on measures that can be put in place to enhance adherence to rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools. The teachers responded in different ways. For instance, one teacher was quoted saying, *“Any teacher should be empowered to administer corporal punishment”*. The other teacher said, *“Teachers should be consulted regularly to check if there may be need for a review of the Education Act of 1967 which relates to corporal punishment”*. *“Students and parents must be educated on the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools,”* said one teacher. In support of several other respondents, one teacher suggested that *“First time teachers should be inducted on the rules and regulations about corporal punishment”*. These quotes show that there is a need to educate students, teachers and parents on the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in schools.

One teacher also suggested, *“Forming a supervisory and monitoring committee that involves parents and management to ensure complete adherence to the use of corporal punishment in schools”*. This goes along with a recommendation by Macheng and Bingana²³ that school community partnerships should be strengthened to enable communities to play a meaningful role in the education system.

Teachers also suggested that alternatives to corporal punishment such as guidance and counselling should be enhanced. In raising this point one teacher was quoted to have said, *“These rules and regulations can only be effectively adhered to if there are strong support systems in cases of indiscipline for teachers, but as it is for now, where even guidance and counselling is not effective, teachers remain desperate and unsafe and as a result resort to corporal punishment”*.

Below is a summary of the suggestions that were deduced from the teachers' responses as the possible measures that could enhance a considerable adherence to the rules and regulations governing corporal punishment by those involved: i. The overall teaching force (new and old) as well as students be familiarised with the rules and regulations governing corporal punishment in schools as enshrined in the act. ii. The current rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment must be reviewed to align them with current demands. iii. The Ministry of Education should encourage the use of other means of disciplining students other than the use of corporal punishment.

Conclusion

The Education Act⁷ stipulates a penalty for persons who contravene the provisions of its part on administration corporal punishment. This study aims at investigating whether there is adherence and if not, what hinders adherence. The study concludes that teachers in Kang Schools follow the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in

schools. Male and female teachers all adhere to the prescribed rules and regulations when administering corporal punishment to students. It can also be concluded that teachers at the junior secondary school studied do not keep registers of corporal punishment though is required by the rule and regulations. The study further concludes that teachers may not be fully observing the rules and regulations as referenced by their overwhelming agreement that there are some challenges hindering adherence. Their response on the challenges and the trend shown by related literature on the use of corporal punishment suggest that adherence is still a big challenge.

Finally, the study concludes that there is an urgent need to educate teachers on the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment to enhance adherence as a considerable number of teachers appeared to be unfamiliar with such rules and regulations.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: i. A similar countrywide study should be conducted so that the findings may benefit all schools in the country. ii. Teachers and students should be educated on the rules and regulations governing the use of corporal punishment in school. iii. Although the findings show that rules and regulations are somewhat followed, it is recommended that they should be enforced especially the one on the administration of corporal punishment on the female students as the 'not sure' ratings suggest that teachers are not well informed about the rules and regulations.

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