

## Shocks and Aftershocks of Corporal Punishment: The Lived Experience of a Secondary School Student

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### Abstract

*This study was undertaken to reveal the lived experiences of a secondary school student who was corporally assaulted to describe detrimental consequences of corporal punishment in schools. A qualitative design informed by descriptive phenomenological inquiry was employed in order to allow the informant tell her experiences of corporal punishment. Face-to face in-depth interviews with the respondent were conducted in her parents' home for the respondent to freely recollect her experiences. The findings suggest that the student was traumatized emotionally, physically and socially as a result of injurious corporal punishment. These shocking events were discussed in the light of previous literature. Based on the findings, the paper concludes by challenging enactment of policies that sustained prevalence of corporal punishment in schools and suggests to do away with policies that make the use of corporal punishment flourish in schools.*

*Keywords: students' discipline, corporal punishment, emotional trauma, physically harm, social harm, descriptive phenomenology, school leadership*

### 1.0 Introduction

There is disagreement between teachers and parents of whether corporal punishment should be used in schools. But, we can all agree that teachers must create conducive school environment for all children to learn and prosper. Yet, most of secondary schools teachers in Tanzania use corporal punishment as a method to discipline students. There are many definitions in literature of what entails corporal punishment. Many of these definitions explain corporal punishment as any physical force which is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort on student, no matter how light the punishment is (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009). According to Naker & Sekitoleko (2009), most of corporal punishments in schools involve hitting (smacking, slapping, spanking) students with the hand or with an instrument—whip, stick, piece of chalk, a piece of wooden. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, burning, scalding, or forced ingestion, in other cases, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices (p.8). All forms of physical punishments have a tendency to make students feel belittled, humiliated, threatened, frightened, incriminated and ridiculed (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009). The most serious issue about corporal punishment in schools is not about what teachers do to discipline students but what a student unfavorably experience.

The right of the child is one of the human rights agreement which sets various aspects regarding the rights of children. For example, Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) generally and openly calls for the governments to ensure that children are protected from all forms

of violence, Article 28 precisely explains that the discipline administered in schools must be consistent with human dignity and Article 37 requires that governments have to ensure that children are not subjected to cruel or inhuman treatment. In this regards, corporal punishment is a global agenda. However, despite of the articulation of the CRC, many countries have not seriously taken much efforts to adhere to the rights of the child. Irrespective of many complications associated with the administering of corporal punishment in schools, there is a prevalence and daily use of corporal punishments in Tanzania secondary schools (Feinstein and Mwahombela, 2010). It is probably because application of corporal punishment in schools remains the cheapest and easiest way to discipline students for teachers (Wilson, 2002). The predominance of corporal punishment in Tanzania schools is justified by Article 60 of 1978 Tanzania Educational Act and the 1979 Tanzanian National Corporal Punishment Regulations among others. These Acts make application of corporal punishment in Tanzanian schools a legitimate action. In many schools, corporal punishment is administered by teachers mostly with the intention of inflicting physical pain for the purpose of controlling and changing students' behaviour (Jambor, 2001; Straus, 2001; Vockell, 1991). However, there is no sufficient humane evidence to defend application of this type of punishment in schools (Keeshan, 1989).

Considering the influence of corporal punishment in changing students' behaviours, Arcus (2002) and Robinson, Funk, Beth & Bush (2005) argue that corporal punishment is associated with a number of negative consequences. As a consequence, in schools corporal punishment has many negative effects compared to positive effect that some perpetrators would tend to suggest. It has been revealed that corporal punishment in schools is associated with lifetime physical and psychological detriments on the part of students (Alvy, 2007; Hayman, 1995). Yet, there is also evidence of corporal punishment being linked to poor student performance in class, fear of teacher and school (Bryan & Freed, 1982), running away from the school (McCown, Driscoll, & Roop, 1996), increased level of anxiety (Biehler & Snowman, 1997) and humiliation and feeling of defencelessness (Cyan, 1995). Same students have been punished from time to time for misbehaving (Teicher, 2005), nevertheless, there is no sufficient evidence to suggest that corporal punishment is linked to behavioral change over time (Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2003). For that reason, even what seems to be an apparent benefit of corporal punishment in schools, opponents of application corporal punishment would count it as a damage (Vockell, 1991).

It is even more difficulty to draw a line that distinguishes between legitimate disciplinary measure in schools and student cruelty (Whipple & Richey, 1997). In this regard, many if not all of the students who have been corporally punished in schools were shocked, shamed, confused, embarrassed and felt uncomfortable. In that, corporal punishment has a negligible positive effect on student behaviour. It is from these evidences and researcher's experience as a teacher this research paper was conceived. Specifically, this inquiry was significant to demonstrate deleterious consequences of corporal punishment as experienced by a secondary school student and the extent to which the punishment affected the student.

In order to capture an understanding of the influences of corporal punishment as experienced by the student, the following research questions were used to guide the investigation:

- i. How does the student explain her experience of corporal punishment?
- ii. What effects does corporal punishment have on student wellbeing?

## 2.0 Method

For the purpose of this research, a form four student who was suspended from school was purposefully selected. Prior to the suspension, the student was physically punished and decided to

run away from the school. She disappeared for three days, then surrendered herself and she was suspended from her studies. Purposive selection of informant was important in order to get a person who was ready and could share the experience of the phenomenon with rich descriptions (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Thus, a descriptive phenomenological designed was used to gather and understand a detailed account (King & Horrocks, 2010) of corporal punishment as experienced by the student. As an approach to data collection and analysis, descriptive phenomenology represents true descriptions of the lived world as perceived by informant (Koch, 1995). The goal was to understand and describe corporal punishment from a person who has experienced it. Whereas both parental and student consent were asked before the interviews, the confidentiality of the student and the school which she studied was guaranteed. In this regard, identities of the student, her parents and even the school she was studying remain unrevealed in this paper to avoid harm to informant, her parents and the school.

The interviews were conducted in the respondent own home, with the belief that it would create a sense of favourable atmosphere for student to recollect her experiences of the phenomenon with more freedom. The interview accounts with the informant were transcribed verbatim, analysed and synthesized using the Colaizzi (1978) procedure. The procedure was preferred as it provided gradual step by step data analysis. The process was engaging on the part of the researcher as it provided a sense of completeness to explain and interpret descriptions of the informant about corporal punishment. The procedure involved three important strategies; namely, intuiting, analysing and describing Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter (2011). While intuiting required the researcher to become entirely immersed in the phenomenon to explore informant's experience of corporal punishment (Speziale, et al., 2011) the researcher identified the essences of the phenomenon from the data that were obtained by analysing the transcriptions and identified the common themes (Speziale, et al., 2011). Transcribing strategy was used to describe the phenomenon with an open mind and faithfully in order to categorize distinctive critical components of the phenomenon (Speziale, et al., 2011).

These critical elements were important to describe the phenomenon as perceived by the informant by probing the data, searching for common themes and establishing patterns of relationships. While the researcher maintained focus around informant's experiences of corporal punishment, due regards was given to informant's explanation of her feelings about the incident. Significant statements were taken from the transcriptions to form categories. The use of the original descriptions of the student and the way each of the significant statement was connected to each theme was then read by the student to determine whether the analysis of transcripts represents her true lived experiences. After reading the transcriptions the respondent explained that her experiences and feelings were correctly represented. The validation of transcriptions and analysis further enhanced and ensured trustworthiness of the findings.

### **3.0 Findings and Discussions**

This section describes and illustrates the themes and sub themes which emerged in the study and provide accounts from significant statements of the informant. Discussions of the findings are also incorporated to show the impact of the phenomenon. In the data analysis, three themes and seven sub themes emerged as summarized in the table 1 below:

Table 1: The Thematic Map

First Theme	Second Theme	Third Theme
Distress and annoyance Sense of sadness Aggravated anger humiliation and shame	Physical harm Complains of encountered pain Realization of body damage	Evasion Escaping from school Detachment from home

### 3.1 Distress and Annoyance

The informant expressed her sense of suffering, frustrations and irritation when she was punished in teachers' office. Verbal and physical retributions were recollected as evidenced in the following explanations:

They (*two teachers*) caned me randomly with sticks on my back, my hands, my legs they only left a head for me (*sic!*). They said bad words (*abusive language*) about me and forced me to admit the bad words they were saying about me were true.... It was actually embarrassing the way they hitted (*sic!*) me like a person who has committed a very big crime which cannot be forgiven. I was so upset and worried because I didn't know when the punishment could end.

The informant's descriptions revealed a high level of emotional suffering caused by physical and verbal punishment which she explained as unbearable. The prevalence of emotional anguish in informant as a result of physical and verbal abuse is in line with previous research such as McLoyd and Smith, (2002) who describe the impact of corporal punishment among others is emotional suffering. Similarly, Hyman (1995) described such punishment can cause emotional trauma of which Wilson (1982) maintains that it can lead to strong emotional side effects. It also creates a fearful temperament and reduces the quality of life for all students (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2001). Such emotional effects are detrimental to students as they can influence the entire life of students (Hyman, 1995). For example, substantial number of research has shown that corporal punishment can result to resentment and feeling of inadequacy, but also schools that have used corporal punishment have higher rates of student behavioral problems (Hyman, 1995). In essence, corporal punishment in school has actually damaging long time consequence on students ranging from impaired learning to depression (Tafa, 2002).

#### 3.1.1 Sense of sadness

The informant narrated how she felt when she was punished continuously and indiscriminately. The accounts represented her feeling of sadness, fear and anguish of corporal punishment. The narrations were characterized by a feeling of distressed, unhappiness and worries as revealed in the following remarks:

It was a very bad day, it was unfortunate for me. I was really nervous and anxious because I didn't know when they (*two teachers*) would stop beating me messily, I was helpless and could not get rid of their brutality.

These feelings of sadness, fear and anguish for students who experienced corporal punishment have been widely documented in the literature as one of the emotional response of children who have been stricken (Breen, Daniels and Tomlinson, 2015; Dobbs, 2007; Sanapo & Nakamura, 2011). It also appears that sadness is linked to the feeling of worthlessness and helplessness on the part of the victim which can reduce self-confidence (Jyoti & Neetu, 2013). Similarly, a survey in some schools

in South Africa has indicated that feeling of anger, hurt sadness and being wronged are some of emotional responses resulting from corporal punishment (Morrell, 1999).

### **3.1.2 Aggravated anger**

The informant expressed strong emotional response of anger and uncomfortable feelings. She also expressed her thoughts of retribution as a result of provocation. These feelings are concisely expressed in the following testimonials:

I was really irritated and frighten. I was about to getting out of control and hit back, it was really a difficulty and an unhappy moment I ever experienced in that school.

The informant narrative shows how the physical punishment intensified her irritations to the extent of having feelings of retaliation. This finding is consistent with previous research which has shown that the impact of corporal punishment can bring to mind of the children feeling of anger and could subsequently damage the relationship between teachers and students (Dobbs, Smith, & Taylor, 2006; Gershoff, 2002) when the victim has to retaliate. Provocation of anger on children as a result of corporal punishment has also been associated with increased fear, anger and sadness (Dobbs, Smith, & Taylor, 2006) but also the probability to increased aggressive behaviour in associating with peers (Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986). The informant descriptions of anger show the level at which she was frustrated and that the experience was intolerable and unmanageable. The informant clearly recalled:

I was disappointed the way they (*Teachers*) treated me. I was hopeless of being secured. I screamed out....punishment worsen, I couldn't find a way out. I was so depressed only had to break down into tears. I found myself feeling like they won't stop biting my body.

The descriptions reveal memory of frustrations that the informant experienced which is frequently revealed with students who have been punished to the extent of feeling anger and thoughts of retribution against the teachers (Hyman, 1990; Hyman & Weiler, 1994).

### **3.1.3 Feeling of shame and humiliation**

Together with physical beating, the informant described how she was verbally assaulted by the teachers. She sorrowfully recalled:

They forced me to admit that I had boyfriends... they even spoke falsely to me that my mother has told them about my behaviour... (*When she explained this, tears started streaming down her chicks*) I don't want even to recall these bad words which they told me.... I did a mistake, but I don't see the reason to be punished to the extent they punished me.

In relation to the above information, it has been reported that individuals who experienced verbal abuse had a feeling of guilty and shame (Hyman, Zelikoff & Clarke, 1988; O'Brien, Cohen, Pooley & Taylor, 2013). Most horrific, psychological maltreatment in the schools comprise among others verbal assaults intended to ridicule and scapegoat (Hyman, 1983). The informant admitted to have broken one of the school rules as she was "heard" talking to a phone, yet, she was emotionally responsive that she did not deserve to be punished to that extent. She explained how the teachers judged her and that she felt her image of a girl and student was reduced to a mere criminal or rather immoral human being. However, although it is acknowledged all over the world of the fact that



severe abuse of girls occurs in the family, there is particular reluctance to admit that it also goes on in school and, most shockingly, that some of it is perpetrated by teachers, who are supposed to be the guardians and protectors” of students predominantly the girls (Leach, 2003). This might suggest manifestations of abusive language and abusive behaviour in general by male teachers towards girls in schools contexts. The informant has also revealed unfavorable treatment in the form of embarrassment, the use of abusive language and intimidation have more harmful psychological impact than a mere immediate slap (Gershoff, 2010; Gershoff, 2002).

### **3.2 Physical Harm**

The informant described traumatic physical assaults that she experienced during and after she was punished. She revealed some bruises and welts on hands and legs and explained how she was also beaten randomly on her back, legs and thighs. This is succinctly described by the informant in the following testimonial:

It was surely a heartbroken moment. It was as if they wanted to cause something worse on me. They hit me with sticks and hands all over my body... I was disappointed when I looked at my body... look! Sores, hurts and wounds are on every part of my body.

The bodily injuries that can be brought by corporal punishment are recognized frequently in researches (Hyman, 1995; Straus and Donnelly, 1993; Youssef, Attia & Kamel, 1998). Researches have shown that corporal punishments can possibility pose significant dangers that might require medical consultations and in this regards, the disciplinary measure goes beyond punishment to “physical abuse” (Straus and Donnelly, 1993). It has also been reported that the repeated use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure can result to stress particularly when teachers use spoken and physical assaults which embarrasses and humiliates students (Hyman, Zelikoff, & Clarke, 1988).

#### **3.2.1 Complains of encountered pain**

The informant described high level of bodily pains as a result of bodily assaults. It was apparent that the informant was confused by pain that was caused by teachers who were supposed to be the immediate guardian she respected most (Gershoff, Purtell & Igor, 2015).

I had very bad pain all through my body. I cried and shouted but that could stop them from whipping and beating me. I surely could not endure the pain any longer. They told me to go for breakfast the comeback in the office... I didn't have any of hunger or thirty...only pain. In fact, that moment for me was a horrific situation. I was beaten many times with sticks, hand and even a ruler, on my back, the legs, hand and even some nails was hurt! (*Informant exhibited one of the fingers' nail which was badly wounded*). It pained like hell, the pain actually made me sick for three day.

In essence, corporal punishment is intended to inflict pain to a student in order to correct behaviour (Douglass and Straus, 2006; Straus and Donnelly, 2005; Straus and Donnelly 1993). The question of causing pain and the way it becomes to be used in school settings as a disciplinary measure is a very serious issue. It is confusing to find that school administrators and teachers see corporal punishment and discipline as synonymous terminology (Wilson, 1982). Causing pain through corporal punishment is a detrimental action rather than productive action. Discipline has to be taken as a constructive action indented to positively improve social, emotional and cognitive of students (Wilson, 1982) but not inflicting pain.

### 3.2.2 Realization of bodily damage

The informant described how she got injuries when the teachers punished in the teachers' office. These injuries resulting from corporal punishment constitute abuse rather than discipline (Gershoff, 2010; Kwok, & Tam, 2005). It was apparent that the informant treated some lesions and scratches as evident in the following informant's account:

Basically, at that moment I could not even carry my school bag because of the wounds on my hands. I had sores at my back, on hands and as you see my hand fingernail was also injured... blood was clotted on my palms and actually felt as if my palms were burnt (*sic!*).

Researches reveal that corporal punishment is linked to not only physical but also psychological harm to students (Dupper & Montgomery, 2008). A distinction between physical punishment and abuse when it comes to the discussion of corporal punishment (Straus & Donnelly, 1993). Straus and Donnelly argue that whereas physical punishment represents to physical force used by teachers to cause pain in target student, abuse refers to the physical force used by people such teachers that causes bodily harm. Although quite a number of researches informed that students bodily damages resulting from corporal punishment in schools are characteristically minor and short-lived, yet severe physical harm can be revealed (Eichelberger, Beal, & May, 1991; Poole, Ushkow, Nader, Bradford, Asbury, Worthington, Sanabria, & Carruth, 1991).

### 3.3 Evasion

The informant expressed the way corporal punishment triggered her feelings of worthless, remembered the painful and scary moment that went along on that day which caused her feeling of not belonging and rejected. This triggered the feeling of unwanted and unloved by her teachers who are the immediate.

#### 3.3.1 Escaping from school

The informant expressed a sense of rejection which resulted to running away from school. In this regards, the informant expressed her feeling of distrust, lowliness and disconnection with the world around her:

I went through very bad and hard times of punishment and intimidation. In fact, it all happened over the space of two hours. I regretted to be in that school but not what I did, just because of having a phone in school! I felt like they don't want to see me around... they hate my presence and myself in their school.

Because of prolonged period of time which seemed to negatively affected student's self-image, thoughts of rejection and denial were predominant. She felt running away was the only solution to the problem of shaming.

I realized that teachers, friends and everybody will look at me with shamefaced and embarrassment... So when they gave me a chance to go for breakfast I directly went dorm (*sic!*) took my veil and run away from school.

Running away from school was a critical incident that the informant experienced which children may even run away from school like the one I used to do because of the fear of being beaten by teachers. According to 1999 Human Rights Watch in Kenya, interviews with victims of corporal punishment revealed that corporal punishment was a strong reason that led to many students running away from school, or even transfer to another school in other cases. Bartman (2002)

contends that schools which frequently use corporal punishments do not perform better academically, their student have aggressive behaviour, and the dropout rate is higher.

### **3.3.2 Detachment from home**

The informant expressed her disinterest to go back home after running away. There is sufficient evidence which provides factors for detachment from home such as abuse of children, conflict in homes as well as well as anxiety cause by corporal punishment (Plass & Hotaling, 1995). The informant expressed that she had unbearable feeling which made her not have a desire to contact or even go back home. These emotional states compelled the informants to leave in a mysterious strange environment other than her home for three days. In this regards, informants articulated:

I was really worried and sad.... I felt discomfort and shame to go back home with wounds. I knew my parents couldn't tolerate the pain if they saw me with hurts on my body. I really didn't want them to be unhappy. I stayed away. I became very depressed.

Explanation provided by informant not only represent her shame to go back home after being corporally punished, but also the description portrays the intensification of being in danger. Detachment from home is considered as an aftershock of corporal punishment. For Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Cauce (2001) staying missing from home is challenging as it an exposures youngsters to several dangers including an increased probability of sexual risk taking, misbehavior and even victimization of an adolescence. Yet, teenagers who disappear from school and home for whatever reasons, often engross themselves in negligent activities, (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and therefore they are probable to be in danger for unfair treatment.

## **4.0 Implication**

Findings from this study reveal that the use of corporal punishment damage students in all human dimensions. Therefore, in order to proscribe the persistent use of uncontrolled brutality against students in educational institutions, teachers should receive adequate training on alternative effective humane methods of discipline. It is essential to provide both teachers and school administrators with knowledge and necessary resources to apply nonviolent and civilized disciplinary procedures that positively encourage students to become active school community members. Positive disciplinary measures are critical to not only create good students but also good schools. The use of positive discipline starts with school administrators who are capable of creating an inclusive commitment against corporal punishment.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation**

The question of inflicting pain as a means to correct behaviours of students in school is a serious issue which need to be addressed by all stakeholders in general and school administrators in particular. Yet, prevalence of bruises all over the body of the victim suggests that there is no standard application of corporal punishment both in private and public schools. How, when and for what misbehaviour should corporal punishment be employed depends on an individual teacher decision and mood in different conditions. In this regard, there arises lot of contradictions and misunderstanding even among the teachers when the victim is severely injured. Bodily retribution as a means of punishment in all schools has created a lot of problems, complications and disappointments to students, teachers, parents and society as a whole. It is problematic to find ways to justify enactment of policies that can make teachers impose suffering, sorrow and shocks to



students. The use of corporal punishment in educational institutions places students in a category vulnerable population. Corporal punishment is actually a question of students being abused, yet, it instils to students an attitude of being violent in controlling the behaviour of others. Consequently, there is a need to develop courses of action that prevent the use of corporal punishment not only in schools, but in all walks of life. Most researchers do concur on the idea that it is acceptable to discipline students, but the methods of discipline should focus on developing students' self-discipline. Stakeholders in education administration, psychologists and educational leaders need to develop approaches that are more preventive and instructional rather than detrimental retributive strategies. From empirical evidence, the effects of corporal punishment on students in schools and even in homes are intrinsically traumatic, therefore efforts must be taken for such kind of punishment to be eliminated in schools and homes.

### Acknowledgement

I am sincerely grateful to the parents of the informant for allowing me to conduct the interviews in their home. I am also extremely grateful to the informant who generously shared her anguish, suffering, experiences and time which made this piece of writing worthwhile sharing.

### Notes on Author

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