

# THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT – PREVALENCE AND ATTITUDINAL RESEARCH IN THE CARIBBEAN



Global Initiative to  
**End All Corporal Punishment  
of Children**

Summaries prepared by the Global Initiative to End  
All Corporal Punishment of Children  
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*Note: No prevalence research identified for Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada. No prevalence research in the last ten years identified for St Kitts and Nevis.*

## **BAHAMAS**

A 2010 study involving a survey of 933 adults and 12 semi-structured interviews with adults examined the coexistence in homes in the Bahamas of corporal punishment of children and other behaviours including including sexual abuse, illegal drug use, violence among adults in the home and hitting of pets. 77% of respondents from households with children reported that “spanking” was sometimes used to discipline them. 37% of respondents said that children were spanked only when “very naughty”, 28% that they were spanked “sometimes”, 26% “rarely” and 9.7% “often”. 4.1% of respondents in households where children were spanked considered the spanking to be abuse. Violence between adults occurred more in households where children were spanked “often” than where they were not spanked “often”.

(Brennen, S. et al, 2010, “A Preliminary Investigation of the Prevalence of Corporal Punishment of Children and Selected Co-occurring Behaviours in Households on New Providence, The Bahamas”, *The International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, vol 16. 2010 pp.1-18)

## **BARBADOS**

A UNICEF study of child vulnerability in Barbados, St Vincent and St Lucia, completed in November 2006, found that younger girls and boys were much more likely to be punished than their teenage siblings in all three countries. The number of small children who received no punishment was below 50% in all countries. Overall, younger children, both girls and boys, were more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment, such as spanking, slapping or hitting with the hand or an object.

(Reported in *The Barbados Advocate*, 23 May 2007)

## **BELIZE**

A UNICEF report published in 2010 states that 70% of children aged 2-14 experienced violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) in 2005-2006. Nearly 60%

experienced physical punishment, while a much smaller percentage (26%) of mothers and caregivers thought that physical punishment was necessary in childrearing, and non-violent discipline was also very widely used: experienced by 93% of children. Eight per cent of children experienced severe physical punishment (being hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or being hit over and over with an implement) and 53% experienced psychological aggression (being shouted at, yelled at, screamed at or insulted). No significant differences in children's experience of violent discipline were found according to sex, age, household size, level of education of adults in the household, or engagement in child labour.

(UNICEF, 2010, *Child Disciplinary Practices at Home: Evidence from a Range of Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, NY: UNICEF)

According to statistics from UNICEF on violence in the family, in 2005-2006 children with disabilities were more likely to experience severe physical punishment: 9% of disabled children aged 2-9 were hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or hit over and over as hard as possible with an implement, compared with 4% of non-disabled children. Twelve per cent of girls and women aged 15-49 thought that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

A survey of 939 school students concerning absenteeism and child-friendly primary schools by the Human Rights Commission of Belize (NGO) found that 39% of children's opinions identified violent behaviour, including corporal punishment by teachers, as the aspect of school children liked the least.

(Hunt, H., 2003, *Leave No Child Out – the report of a survey on why children don't go to school and on how schools can be child-friendly*, Belize: Human Rights Commission of Belize)

In consultation for a report on the laws relating to corporal punishment, a group of seven 12-16-year-old children reported that children are beaten by parents, teachers, siblings, classmates and policemen, because these adults are angry, frustrated, sad, stressed, under pressure, drunk, on drugs, or have low self esteem. The beatings take place in the home, in school, on the street; they involve all parts of the bodies but especially children's backs, buttocks, head, hands and legs; and they occur almost every day. Beatings are done with a variety of instruments, including broomsticks, belts, electric cords, paddles and shoes.

(Hunt, H., 2003, *Corporal punishment in Belize – the legal framework for violence against children* (Belize: National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect))

## **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

According to statistics from UNICEF on violence in the family, 83% of children aged 2-14 experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression in 2005-2006: 45% experienced physical punishment and psychological aggression, 27% experienced psychological aggression only and 12% experienced physical punishment only. In total, 57% of children experienced physical punishment, while only 9% of mothers and caregivers believe that physical punishment is necessary in childrearing. Of girls and women aged 15-49, 9% think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

## GUYANA

A UNICEF report published in 2010 states that 76% of children aged 2-14 experienced violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) in 2005-2006. Nearly two thirds experienced physical punishment, while a smaller percentage (27%) of mothers and caregivers thought that physical punishment was necessary in childrearing, and non-violent discipline was also widely used: experienced by 87% of children. One child in six experienced severe physical punishment (being hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or being hit over and over with an implement) and 67% experienced psychological aggression (being shouted at, yelled at, screamed at or insulted). Boys were slightly more likely than girls to experience violent discipline: 80% compared to 75%. Children aged 5-9 were slightly more likely to experience violent discipline than those of other ages: 79% of children aged 5-9 compared to 78% of children aged 2-4 and 75% of children aged 10-14. Children living in larger households were more likely to experience violent discipline: 82% of children in households of 6 or more people compared to 74% of children in households of 2-3 people. The statistics also suggest that children with more siblings are more likely to experience violent discipline in most countries involved in the study (p. 72). Children engaged in child labour experienced violent discipline more than those who were not engaged in child labour: 88% compared to 80%. No significant differences in children's experience of violent discipline were found according to the level of education of adults in the household.

(UNICEF, 2010, *Child Disciplinary Practices at Home: Evidence from a Range of Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, NY: UNICEF)

According to statistics from UNICEF on violence in the family, in 2005-2006 eighteen per cent of girls and women aged 15-49 thought that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

Research carried out in 2008 by a group of individuals and organisations identified the views, needs and fears of children, parents and teachers, based on focus groups, questionnaires, interviews, and reviews of relevant research and political and non-political materials. It found, among other things, that while there was high support for school corporal punishment among parents (92%) and only 8% felt it should be abolished, almost one in four (23%) felt that children would be better behaved in class if corporal punishment was not used and 2% felt there would be no change in behaviour. Parents reported they would support prohibition if schools and teachers were properly resourced and trained in positive disciplinary methods. Few parents indicated that their opinions would be changed by media campaigns or celebrity endorsements.

(Smith, C. and Mbozi, J., 2008, *Removing Corporal Punishment from Schools: Integrating Partner Efforts*, Georgetown: Business Unlimited Consulting Services, [www.hands.org.gy/files/Corporal%20Punishment%20Report%20-%202008.pdf](http://www.hands.org.gy/files/Corporal%20Punishment%20Report%20-%202008.pdf))

In June 2007, the Minister of Education Shaik Baksh announced that the Ministry had conducted a survey on the use of corporal punishment in schools which found that 53% of schools use corporal

punishment as a means of maintaining discipline and 47% do not. Phase two of this survey would focus on finding out what are the factors that lead to these schools not using corporal punishment, the performance of the students, the level of violence in the schools and other factors.

(Reported in *Stabroek News*, 8 June 2007)

An assessment of standards in the twenty residential care institutions in Guyana found that 55% of them allowed beating children as a punishment.

(Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, 2006, *Assessment of procedural and physical standards in children's residential care institutions in Guyana*)

In February 2005, government-commissioned research was published based on accounts of almost 4,000 children aged 3-17 years about their experiences of violence in home, schools and the wider community. Corporal punishment was the fourth most commonly mentioned type of abuse (45%), after fighting, killing/murder and beating/being-up, and various types of corporal punishment were mentioned by just under half the groups in every area (43-50%). Of those interviewed (aged 7-17), 87% had received corporal punishment of some kind (licks, lashes, beating) at least once in the home and 81% had been beaten or hit with a belt, cane, whip or other object; children as young as 3 years reported being disciplined by their parents with an object. There was no difference relating to gender, ethnicity or geographical area. One third (33%) of children described physical punishments leading to injury (bleeding skin, broken bones, blacking out). Corporal punishment as most commonly reported as being inflicted by mothers. Over a quarter (27%) of children in the children's homes visited reported being physically hurt by a caregiver in the home, and a similar number reported being physically punished by staff at the New Opportunity Corps training school.

(Cabral, C. & Speek-Warnery, V., 2005, *Voices of Children: Experiences with Violence*, Georgetown: Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security/ Red Thread Women's Development Programme/ UNICEF-Guyana)

A campaign was launched in 2004 by the National Commission on the Rights of the Child in primary and secondary schools in Georgetown to find out children's views on corporal punishment. The survey found that 3,645 children in primary schools were in favour of corporal punishment, with 2,043 against it. In secondary schools, 932 children were in favour of corporal punishment compared with 1,335 against.

(Reported in "Culture of beating children goes deep – workshop on alternatives told", *Stabroek News*, 17 June 2004)

## HAITI

According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, of girls and women aged 15-49, 29% think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

Research by Amnesty International found that despite the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools, it was commonly reported, including the use of whips, beatings with electric cables, and forcing children to kneel in the sun.

In UNICEF's Voices of Children survey, 14% of children reported living in a family where there were scenes of violence and aggression. Four in ten (40%) said they were hit or beaten when they behaved badly, the figure even higher among rural children aged 9-13 years.

(Reported in Government response to UN Study on Violence Against Children Questionnaire, 2005)

## JAMAICA

A UNICEF report published in 2010 states that 89% of children aged 2-14 experienced violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) in 2005-2006. Over three quarters experienced physical punishment, while a smaller percentage (33%) of mothers and caregivers thought that physical punishment was necessary in childrearing, and non-violent discipline was also widely used: experienced by 89% of children. Nine per cent of children experienced severe physical punishment (being hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or being hit over and over with an implement) and 77% experienced psychological aggression (being shouted at, yelled at, screamed at or insulted). Children aged 5-9 were more likely to experience violent discipline than those of other ages: 92% of children aged 5-9 compared to 90% of children aged 2-4 and 86% of children aged 10-14. Children living in households with adults with a higher average level of education were less likely to experience violent discipline than those living with less educated adults. Children engaged in child labour experienced violent discipline more than those who were not engaged in child labour: 95% compared to 89%. No significant differences in children's experience of violent discipline were found according to sex or household size.

(UNICEF, 2010, *Child Disciplinary Practices at Home: Evidence from a Range of Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, NY: UNICEF)

A 2010 government sponsored attitudinal survey of 1,000 adults, carried out by Market Research Services Limited, revealed that the majority – regardless of socio-economic status – believe beating a child is necessary in correcting bad behaviour; 30% supported ending the beating of children. More than half (51.8%) did not agree that acts such as pinching, hitting the head, biting, kicking and thumping a child constituted corporal punishment. 51% said that they had physically punished a child. However, 80% of those surveyed agreed that parents could use other forms of discipline that are just as effective.

(Reported in *The Gleaner*, 17 February 2010, [www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100217/lead/lead4.html](http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100217/lead/lead4.html))

According to statistics from UNICEF on violence in the family, in 2005-2006 six per cent of disabled children and six per cent of non-disabled children were hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or hit over and over as hard as possible with an implement. Six per cent of girls and women aged 15-49 thought that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

Focus group research with parents, children aged 5-8 years and practitioners in 2007 found that young children were still receiving corporal punishment despite the prohibition in the Early Childhood Act passed in 2005.

(Reported in *The Jamaica Observer*, 6 June 2007)

According to a study reported in *The Gleaner* in March 2007, in a survey of teachers from all types of primary educational settings, one in four admitted to flogging students often and one in three to pinching and thumping them. Boys were more likely to be flogged. Less than a quarter of teachers believed beating was effective, and almost half identified negative effects they had seen, including students becoming oppositional, aggressive, destructive towards school property, gathering peer support against teachers, and becoming “disconnected” from school activities.

(Reported in *Jamaica Gleaner Online*, 21 March 2007)

A survey conducted in July 2006 for *The Gleaner* found that 60% of respondents were in favour of spanking and caning in schools, with 28% feeling strongly that teachers should be given the right to physically punish students. Over a third (37%) opposed corporal punishment, including 13% who were strongly against it.

(Reported in “Jamaica Gleaner-Bill Johnson Poll – Majority support caning in schools”, *Jamaica Gleaner Online*, 19 August 2006)

203 parents (71.3% mothers, 6.4% fathers, and other caregivers) from across six parishes, of 100 boys and 103 girls aged between 5 and 7, completed questionnaires which were administered by trained interviewers, followed by an investigation into the frequency of use of specific disciplinary methods. Of the 193 parents who responded to questionnaires about the disciplinary methods they used in their homes, 28% reported that non-violent methods were most commonly used; 25.4% reported psychological aggression and 46.6% physical assault. Of those reporting physical assault, 1% reported pinching, 31.1% spanking, 13% beating with an object, 1% shaking, and 0.5% tying of hands. In the week prior to the interview, 1% reported spanking more than 7 times, 3.1% 4-6 times, and 27.4% 1-3 times. Beating with a strap was reported as occurring 1-3 times over the same period by 14.6% of respondents.

(Samms-Vaughan, M., Williams, S. & Brown, J., 2004, *Disciplinary Practices among parents of six-year-olds in Jamaica*, University of the West Indies)

Research was undertaken into the experiences of 1,720 children aged 11-12 (51.5% girls, 48.4% boys; 68.7% in primary schools, 32.3% in secondary schools) on conflict resolution measures between themselves and adults at home and school (the schools were in two urban parishes). Overall, 97.2% of children reported a lifetime experience of verbal aggression or violence resulting from conflict with adults in the home, with 82.3% reporting verbal aggression, 87.4% minor violence, and 84.8% severe violence. The preferred methods of resolving conflict between adults and children in the home were pushing, grabbing and slapping (86%) or beating with an object (84.2%). The main cause of conflict was reported as disobedience (reported by 73.5% of children). The mother was most frequently reported as responsible for administering discipline (73.7%, cf. fathers 30.5%, uncles and aunts 9.2%,

grandparents 7.6%, siblings 4.6% and step-parents 2.7%). With regard to conflict resolution between teachers and children, a total of 86.2% of children reported a lifetime prevalence of verbal aggression or physical violence, with verbal aggression reported by 49.3%, minor violence by 74% and severe violence by 75.4%. The most common forms of resolving conflict were reported as pushing, grabbing or slapping (with a lifetime prevalence of 70.8%) and beating with an object (75.3%). For 64% of children there were no incidents in the four weeks prior to the survey, but for some such incidents occurred daily. Most physical punishment was administered by the class teacher (83.3%), followed by the principal (9.1%), the vice principal (3.9%) and subject teachers (1.7%).

(Samms-Vaughan, M. et al., 2004, "Jamaican Children's Experiences of Corporal Punishment at Home and School", University of the West Indies/Ministry of Health, University of Missouri-Columbia)

In a focus group with twenty children aged 10-18 years, living in children's homes and "places of safety" in Jamaica, a common thread that ran through their conversations was the beatings given by Housemothers and 'Aunties'. Corporal punishment was also raised as a concern in a focus group with workers for NGOs, and in written submissions from members of the public.

(Keating, S., 2003, *A Review of Children's Homes*, [www.jamaicansforjustice.org/docs/Keating%20Report.pdf](http://www.jamaicansforjustice.org/docs/Keating%20Report.pdf))

## **ST LUCIA**

A UNICEF study of child vulnerability in Barbados, St Vincent and St Lucia, completed in November 2006, found that younger girls and boys were much more likely to be punished than their teenage siblings in all three countries. The number of small children who received no punishment was below 50% in all countries. Overall, younger children, both girls and boys, were more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment, such as spanking, slapping or hitting with the hand or an object.

(Reported in *The Barbados Advocate*, 23 May 2007)

A UNICEF study on Child Rights in Saint Lucia (2000) found that the method of discipline of children most favoured by respondents was corporal punishment (59%), marginally greater among lower socio-economic respondents and males.

(Cited in initial state party report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004, CRC/C/28/Add.23, para.98)

## **ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

A UNICEF study of child vulnerability in Barbados, St Vincent and St Lucia, completed in November 2006, found that younger girls and boys were much more likely to be punished than their teenage siblings in all three countries. The number of small children who received no punishment was below 50% in all countries. Overall, younger children, both girls and boys, were more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment, such as spanking, slapping or hitting with the hand or an object.

(Reported in *The Barbados Advocate*, 23 May 2007)

## **SURINAME**

A UNICEF report published in 2010 states that 86% of children aged 2-14 experienced violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) in 2005-2006. Sixty-two per cent experienced physical punishment, while a smaller percentage (17%) of mothers and caregivers thought that physical punishment was necessary in childrearing, and non-violent discipline was also widely used: experienced by 95% of children. One child in ten experienced severe physical punishment (being hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or being hit over and over with an implement) and 81% experienced psychological aggression (being shouted at, yelled at, screamed at or insulted). Children living in households with adults with a higher average level of education were less likely to experience violent discipline than those living with less educated adults. No significant differences in children's experience of violent discipline were found according to sex, age, household size or engagement in child labour.

(UNICEF, 2010, *Child Disciplinary Practices at Home: Evidence from a Range of Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, NY: UNICEF)

According to statistics from UNICEF on violence in the family, in 2005-2006 nine per cent of disabled children aged 2-9 were hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or hit over and over as hard as possible with an implement, compared with 8% of non-disabled children. Thirteen per cent of girls and women aged 15-49 thought that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

In a survey conducted by the Teachers Training College in 1999, 12.9% of parents reported that they applied corporal punishment; 50% endorsed the use of corporal punishment in school.

(Reported in second state party report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, CRC/C/SUR/2, para. 59)

## **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

A UNICEF report published in 2010 states that 77% of children aged 2-14 experienced violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) in 2005-2006. More than half experienced physical punishment, while a smaller percentage (25%) of mothers and caregivers thought that physical punishment was necessary in childrearing, and non-violent discipline was also widely used: experienced by 89% of children. One child in twenty experienced severe physical punishment (being hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or being hit over and over with an implement) and 68% experienced psychological aggression (being shouted at, yelled at, screamed at or insulted). Children aged 2-4 were more likely to experience violent discipline than older children: 83% of children aged 2-4 compared to 79% of children aged 5-9 and 74% of children aged 10-14. No significant differences in children's experience of violent discipline were found according to sex, household size, level of education of adults in the household or engagement in child labour.

(UNICEF, 2010, *Child Disciplinary Practices at Home: Evidence from a Range of Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, NY: UNICEF)

According to statistics from UNICEF on violence in the family, in 2005-2006 eight per cent of girls and women aged 15-49 thought that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)