

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, Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada

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)

A questionnaire survey was administered to 290 pupils aged 10-11 years (125 boys, 165 girls), from 11 elementary schools from urban, suburban, and rural districts, in 1989-90. The research found that nearly 75% of pupils approved of corporal punishment at junior level, around 50% at secondary level and around 30% at infant level, but did not approve of routine (and illegal) “flogging” or “lashing” by regular classroom teachers.

(Anderson, S. & Payne, M. A., 1994, “Corporal punishment in elementary education: Views of Barbadian schoolchildren”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol.18, no.4, pp.377-386)

A questionnaire survey of 499 Barbadian adults (236 men, 263 women) aged 20-59 in 1987 found that 70% approved of corporal punishment as a way of disciplining children. Most of those who approved (76.5%) endorsed “flogging/lashing with a belt or strap” as a method, with the buttocks most frequently endorsed as the part of the body to which it should be administered. Other methods approved included slapping with the hand (14.4%), spanking with a shoe or similar object (14.2%), and using a rod or cane (13.3%). Only 23.3% considered that corporal punishment should never be used.

(Payne, M.A., 1989, “Use and abuse of corporal punishment: A Caribbean view”, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 13, pp.389-401)

A survey of over 1,000 secondary school pupils reported in 1988 revealed that just over 60% were in favour of flogging or caning, but only about 3% approved of “unofficial” random hitting and cuffing by classroom teachers.

(Payne, M. A., 1988, *Discipline and punishment in Barbadian secondary schools: The students’ perspective* (Cave Hill, Barbados: University of the West Indies, Faculty of Education Occasional Paper No.1). Cited in Anderson, S. & Payne, M. A., 1994, “Corporal punishment in elementary education: Views of Barbadian schoolchildren”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol.18, no.4)

BELIZE

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))

GUYANA

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)

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/beat-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)

In an interview survey of 1,200 pupils aged 9-17 in 24 secondary schools, 56.1% reported being whipped by their teachers (55.7% boys, 57.8% girls), using branches from trees, pieces of wood, rulers, metal strips from old tables and other parts of old school furniture, or hands. 18% reported being made to kneel down by teachers, 20.2% being shaken, and 26.3% being slapped. 26.2% reported suffering injuries as a result of abuse by teachers.

(Gill-Marshall, 2000, “Child Abuse in Guyana: A study of teacher abuse of children” (University of Guyana Thesis). Cited in NGO Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003)

A survey in 1998 of 250 women on their experiences of childhood abuse found that 92% reported being beaten sometimes and often as children. When asked whether and how children should be punished, the most common response was by hitting, slapping and/or lashing. Of the 42.5% who answered a question on the age at which hitting should begin, most indicated that toddler and pre-school ages were most appropriate; 16.9% stated that hitting should begin when children are aged 1-2 years; 16.7% indicated when children are school aged (6 and over); 5.1% felt hitting should begin for babies aged 6-12 months, 2.9% from birth. Around 70% of the women who had children reported hitting them.

(Red Thread Women’s Development Programme, 1998, *Women Researching Women*, Georgetown: Inter-American Development Bank. Cited in NGO Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003)

HAITI

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.

(Amnesty International, 2008, *Safe Schools: Every girl’s right*)

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

According to a statistical review by UNICEF, 73% of children aged 2-14 experienced minor physical punishment in the home in 2005-2006, although a smaller percentage of mothers/caretakers (34%) believed that children need to be physically punished. The same review reported that 6% of girls and women aged 15-49 believed that a husband or partner is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2007, *Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children – Statistical Review, Number 6, December 2007*)

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)

A study of 75 economically deprived families in 1994 found that 79% of the mothers polled had beaten their 2-5 year olds with an implement.

(Reported in “JA ranked 2nd in the world for smacking kids”, *The Jamaica Observer*, 27 February 2006)

ST KITTS AND NEVIS

As part of a large scale ethnographic study reported in 1991, 349 children aged 9-16 were given questionnaires and information sheets concerning physical punishment and children and caretakers were interviewed. 61% of children (69% of caretakers) agreed with the statement “Beatings are a good and normal part of raising children”; 73% of children (86% of caretakers) agreed with “It is for children’s own good that parents beat them”; 67% of children (80% of caretakers) agreed “I know my mother loves me because she beats me”; 93% of caretakers believed that parents should beat their children for misbehaviour and 94% agreed with the statement “He who spares the rod spoils the child”. The frequency and severity of physical punishment (including slapping, spanking, cuffing, thumping, burning, shoving and beating with an implement) were also researched. Children reported being punished on average over four times in a two week period, though some reported being punished several times daily. Younger children and boys were punished more often and more severely than older children and girls. Higher socio-economic status caretakers punished children less frequently and less severely than lower status caretakers.

(Rohner, R. P., Kean, K. J. & Cournoyer, D. E., 1991, “Effects of corporal punishment, perceived caretaker warmth, and cultural beliefs on the psychological adjustment of children in St Kitts, West Indies”, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.53, pp.681-693)

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

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

According to a statistical review by UNICEF, 51% of children aged 2-14 experienced minor physical punishment in the home in 2005-2006, although a smaller percentage of mothers/caretakers (25%) believed that children need to be physically punished. The same review reported that 8% of girls and women aged 15-49 believed that a husband or partner is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2007, *Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children – Statistical Review, Number 6, December 2007*)