

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



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 Bhutan.*

## AFGHANISTAN

Qualitative research into adults' perspectives on everyday physical violence against children within the family, published in 2008, involved interviews with more than 200 men and women from 61 families in urban and rural areas in four provinces, plus 56 focus group discussions and 46 interviews with key informants. The study found that violence against children is widely used and recognised, though to a significant degree is not regarded with approval. Physical violence existed to varying degrees within all 61 case study families, most commonly slapping, verbal abuse, punching, kicking, and hitting with thin sticks, electrical cables and shoes. More unusual types of violence included shooting at children, tying them up, washing them in cold water outside during winter and public humiliation. Corporal punishment was used on children as young as 2 or 3 years. No clear difference between punishment of boys and of girls was found, but men were perceived as having more "rights" to be violent towards children than women in the family.

(Smith, Deborah J., 2008, *Love, Fear and Discipline: Everyday violence toward children in Afghan families*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit)

In a survey by Save the Children reported in 2003, 82% of children interviewed reported that slapping, kicking and hitting with a stick are common forms of punishment. Hair and ear pulling were reported by nearly 6% of children. Over half reported being hit or severely beaten for being noisy or naughty, almost a quarter for not learning their school lessons, and nearly one in ten for disobeying adults.

(Save the Children Sweden Afghanistan, 2003, *Mini Survey Report on Corporal Punishment*, Kabul: Save the Children, cited in Jabeen, F., 2004, *Corporal/physical and psychological punishment of girls and boys in South and Central Asia Region*, Save the Children Sweden Denmark)

A study involving 2080 questionnaires and focus group discussions with children in orphanages found that violence against children was sometimes cited as a major concern, and many references were made to corporal punishment in the home and in schools.

(Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and UNICEF Afghanistan, 2003, *Children deprived of parental care in Afghanistan – whose responsibility?*)

## **BANGLADESH**

In a random survey conducted by Andhra Pradesh Bala Sangham, an NGO, students of about 12 schools stated on camera that they had been subjected to corporal punishment, despite a Supreme Court judgment in January 2011 that corporal punishment in schools was unconstitutional.

(Reported in *Deccan Chronicle*, 7 Feb 2011)

A 2009 report by UNICEF documented a high prevalence of corporal punishment of children at home and school. The study involved nearly 4000 households, through interviews with children aged 9-18 and the heads of their households, focus group discussions, case studies and a special survey with children living on the street. The research found that 91% of children in school experience physical punishment. Poorer children were more likely to experience it, with greater frequency and severity, than richer students. Punishments included hitting the palm with a ruler or stick (experienced by 76% of students), standing in class, hitting other body parts with a ruler or stick, and slapping. 23% of students said they faced corporal punishment every day and 7% reported injuries and bleeding as a result. Corporal punishment was one of the top four reasons children gave for not attending school. In the home, 99.3% of children reported being verbally abused and threatened regularly by their parents, while 74% said they were physically punished by parents or guardians. 70% were usually slapped, and 40% were regularly beaten or kicked. 367 of the children who took part in the study worked outside the home. Of these, 25% experienced physical punishment in their workplace, with older girls and young boys receiving more physical punishment than other groups. Girls were more likely to be seriously injured by corporal punishment than boys. Physical punishment in the workplace was felt to be unacceptable by 59% of working children.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Opinions of Children of Bangladesh on Corporal Punishment: Children's Opinion Poll 2008*, Dhaka: UNICEF & Ministry of Women and Children Affairs)

A study reported in 2005 of 153 children in 16 groups and 109 adults in 13 groups examined behaviours children liked and behaviour children disliked. The children identified a total of 1,043 behaviours that they disliked from people in the immediate family, educational settings and the workplace. Of these, 293 were categorised as physical discipline/punishment, 206 as verbal discipline/punishment, and 66 as other kinds of discipline/punishment, representing the top three disliked behaviours.

(Government of Bangladesh/UNICEF/Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Child Abuse Study: Study Report*, Draft Version, 25 January 2005)

A survey by Save the Children of more than 2,500 child domestic workers in Dhaka found that almost two thirds of employers said they were prepared to beat their servants.

(Reported in Jabeen, F., 2004, *Corporal/physical and psychological punishment of girls and boys in South and Central Asia Region*, Save the Children Sweden Denmark)

## INDIA

A 2011 report on gender equality which involved 6,011 respondents aged 10-35 found that physical, verbal and emotional violence, including in the name of “discipline”, was common in homes and schools, and that mothers and fathers were the main perpetrators of violence.

(Plan India, 2011, *Engaging Men and Boys towards Gender Equality: The State of the Girl Child in India 2011*)

A large scale comparative study (World Studies of Abuse in the Family Environment (WorldSAFE)) which involved surveys with over 14,000 mothers of children aged under 18, carried out between 1998 and 2003, examined parental discipline in Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Philippines, and the United States. In India, the rate of “moderate” physical discipline (including “spanking” a child’s buttocks, hitting a child with an object, slapping a child’s face and putting hot pepper in a child’s mouth) ranged from 63% in urban and rural communities in Vellore to 89% in a rural community in Bhopal. The rate of harsh physical discipline (including burning, beating up, kicking and smothering a child) ranged from 2.7% in a non-slum community in Delhi to 39% in a rural community in Bhopal. The rate of harsh psychological discipline such as calling children names, cursing them and threatening to abandon them or kick them out ranged from 40% in a non-slum community in Chennai to 81% in a rural community in Lucknow. “Moderate” psychological discipline, including yelling or screaming at children, refusing to speak to them or withholding food was experienced by between 76% of children (in a rural community in Vellore) and 96% of children (in an urban slum community in Nagpur). Non-violent discipline, including explaining why a behaviour was wrong and telling a child to stop, was also widely used (89-99%). The study found that rates of harsh physical discipline were dramatically higher in all communities than published rates of official physical abuse in any country, and that rates of physical punishment can vary widely among communities within the same country.

(Runyan, D. et al, 2010, “International Variations in Harsh Child Discipline”, *Pediatrics*, published online 2 August 2010, [www.pediatrics.org](http://www.pediatrics.org))

According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, of girls and women aged 15-49, 54% 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)

In February 2008 the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights published a report on the state of penal institutions for children in conflict with the law, based on a detailed study of juvenile care centres (“juvenile homes”) across the country. Physical punishment was found to be a dominant disciplinary method in 70% of the centres.

(Reported in *BigNewsNetwork.com*, 18 February 2008)

In 2007, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, published the first nationwide study on child abuse in India, based on the experiences of 12,447 children aged 5-18 years from across 13 states and

also involving 2,324 young adults (aged 18-24) and 2,449 stakeholders (adults holding positions in government departments, private service and urban and rural local bodies, and individuals from the community). The study revealed a high prevalence of corporal punishment of children in all the settings – their family homes, schools, institutions and on the streets. Of the total number of children, 69% reported physical abuse, including corporal punishment, in one or more situations, more commonly (54.68%) boys and young children (48.29%). In the 5-12 age group, nearly three out of four (72.2%) reported physical abuse in one or more situations, in the 13-14 year age group 70.61%, and among 15-18 year olds 62.13%. Of children abused within the family, in the majority of cases the perpetrators were parents (reported by 88.6% of respondents – 50.9% mothers, 37.6% fathers). The second most commonly reported perpetrators were teachers (44.8%), followed by employers (12.39%), caregivers (9.45%), NGO workers (4.78%) and others. The difference between boys and girls was marginal, but age was significant, with young children aged 5-12 the most vulnerable and the risk declining for children aged 13-14 and again for adolescents aged 15-18. The most commonly reported punishment was being slapped and kicked (63.67%), followed by being beaten with a stave or stick (31.31%), and being pushed, shaken, etc (5.02%). For many (15.6%) the hurt resulted in serious physical injury, swelling or bleeding. When stakeholders were asked for their views on physical/corporal punishment, over 44.54% felt it was necessary in disciplining children; 25.45% disagreed with its necessity; 30.01% expressed no opinion. When asked about most suitable form of punishment for discipline, 35.24% said scolding or shouting, 11.31% slapping or beating with a stick, almost 11% felt locking a child in a room or denying food was suitable punishment.

(Kacker, L., Varadan, S. & Kumar, P., 2007, *Study on Child Abuse: India 2007*, New Dehli: Ministry of Women and Child Development)

As part of the Supporting Positive Alternatives in Raising Kindness in Education (SPARKE) project, questionnaires with teachers, parents and 201 students aged 8-18 were carried out before and after a project which aimed to promote the use of positive discipline in five schools in northern India. Before the project, 78.9% of boys and 40.7% of girls aged 8-11, 74.1% of boys and 54.3% of girls aged 12-15 and 80% of boys and 65.2% of girls aged 16-18 had experienced corporal punishment in the past year. More than eight teachers in ten (83.33%) had used corporal punishment, 43.52% “occasionally”, 33.33% a few times a month and 6.48% at least once a week. Types of corporal punishment included forcing children to stay in uncomfortable or painful positions or do physical exercise, twisting children’s ears, slapping, pinching, caning and kicking children. Students also experienced verbal punishments, such as being ridiculed or insulted. Before the project, 72.28% of teachers wanted to find alternatives to corporal punishment and 87.74% thought that teaching staff needed training in alternative disciplining methods. Nearly seven in ten teachers (68.32%) and 44-87% of students said they would like to be part of a group in their school working against corporal punishment. After the project, 33.33% of boys and 10.34% of girls aged 8-11, 52.24% of boys and 34.69% of girls aged 12-15 and 48.15% of boys and 25.93% of girls aged 16-18 had experienced corporal punishment in the past ten months. Before the project, between 39% and 69% of students thought that corporal punishment should be used in school. After the project, 13%-39% thought that corporal punishment should be used in school, with 52-80% thinking it should not be used, and 73-84% saying they would like their teachers to use positive discipline methods instead of corporal punishment.

(Cedar Woods Consulting Group for SOIR-IM, 2007, *Supporting Positive Alternatives in Raising Kindness in Education: The SPARKE Research Report*)

A survey in 2004 of 1,500 adolescents in ten government schools of Chandigarh, carried out by the Advanced Pediatric Center, PGI found that the prevalence rate of corporal punishment was 22%.

(Reported in *Chandigarh Newslines*, 21 June 2007)

A 2004 study by the NGO Aapanach found that, of 350 children surveyed from public, private, and municipal schools, over 75% said that they received punishment at school, and nearly 60% said the most frequent form of punishment was caning or hitting with a ruler. It was common for the whole class to be punished (66%). A third (33%) reported cases of severe injury due to punishment.

(Reported in *cities.expressindia.com*, 7 April 2007)

Research in urban schools in Andhra Pradesh in 2006 found that 59% of students said they had been hit on the palms of the hands with a cane by a teacher and 71% had witnessed this kind of punishment in school. Other kinds of corporal punishment experienced by children included forcing them to kneel in uncomfortable positions, slapping or spanking and beating on the knuckles. 45% of students said that they had witnessed corporal punishment which caused swelling and 22% had seen it cause bleeding. 13% had witnessed corporal punishment which necessitated a visit to a doctor. Only 25% of students who experienced corporal punishment at school chose to tell their parents about it. 23% of those who did not tell their parents said that this was because their parents would beat them too. Children from lower income groups were more likely to experience corporal punishment. The research involved nearly 600 children and over 300 adults, including teachers and parents, through interviews and group discussions.

(Devi Prasad, B., 2006, *Spare the Rod and Save the Child: A Study of the Corporal punishment in urban schools of Andhra Pradesh*, Child Rights Advocacy Foundation-Vijayawada, [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/children/countries/india/india-research.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/children/countries/india/india-research.html))

A large scale research study conducted in May 2006 by Saath Charitable Trust and supported by Plan International (India) looked at children's experiences of corporal punishment in schools and in the home in one district in each of four states – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. The research involved 1,591 children mostly from 41 schools as well as members of various children's organisations. Parents, teachers (215) community members, government officials and other adults were also consulted. The main methods used were interviews, focus group discussions, and role play and classroom observation. The study found corporal punishment to be an accepted way of life in all the schools and communities visited. The most common forms of punishments were hitting with hands and stick, pulling hair and ears, and telling children to stand for long period in various positions. Threats of physical violence were also common. Severe forms of corporal punishment were also encountered, including being severely kicked, starvation, tying with rope to chairs/poles followed by beatings, and being assigned physically strenuous labour (e.g. in the fields). In all schools, there would be at least five beatings every day, in addition to other more moderate forms of punishment, though the punishments were less severe than those experienced in the home. Punishment in the home was inflicted by mothers and fathers on both girls and boys with equal severity, more frequently for boys.

(Saath Charitable Trust/Plan International, India, 2006, *Impact of Corporal Punishment on School Children: A Research Study – Final Report*)

## MALDIVES

An unpublished large scale 2009 UNICEF study found that 47% of children had experienced physical or emotional punishment at home, at school or in the community. The study involved almost 17,035 people in 2500 households and 2000 children in schools. Thirty per cent of children at secondary school had been hit by at least one of their caregivers, 21% with an object; 8% of school students had been physically punished by their teachers.

(Reported by *Minivan News*, 21 February 2011, [www.minivannews.com](http://www.minivannews.com))

According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, of girls and women aged 15-49, 70% 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)

## NEPAL

A study on barriers to education for children with disabilities in Nepal found that students with disabilities experienced corporal punishment at home and at school, and that this could contribute to the children's lack of access to education.

(Human Rights Watch, 2011, *Futures Stolen: Barriers to Education for Children with Disabilities in Nepal*)

According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, of girls and women aged 15-49, 23% 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)

A 2008 study in 71 child centres in Nepal involved interviews and focus groups with children, child centre staff and children's biological parents. It found that punishments in child centres included hitting children, isolating them, locking them in the toilet, public humiliation, and forcing them to clean floors and toilets.

(UNICEF and Terre des Hommes, 2008, *Adopting the Rights of the Child: A study on intercountry adoption and its influence on child protection in Nepal*, [www.crin.org/docs/adopting\\_rights\\_child\\_ICA.pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/adopting_rights_child_ICA.pdf))

In a study in the schools of Kathmandu, 82% of students were found to suffer physical punishment in schools; 80% of students said that alternative methods can be used to discipline children.

(Reported in *The Rising Nepal*, 24 December 2006)

In December 2003, the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT), in collaboration with UNICEF, conducted a focus group study on "Existing Systems of Discipline in Schools" among students, teachers and parents in four regions. The study revealed that corporal punishment was being used in most schools, more commonly in the private than the public schools. Physical punishment was most commonly used against primary school students, while psychological punishment was more common against secondary level students. Both were commonly used against lower secondary students. Many

teachers and parents reported that they give severe punishment to children because they were unaware of alternatives to corporal punishment and knew little about the physical and psychological impacts of harsh punishments.

(Reported in CVICT, Monthly Update, June 2004)

## PAKISTAN

In a survey carried out by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) in 2011, 76% of parents were in favour of corporal punishment and believed it was “necessary to correct children’s behaviour”.

(Reported in *The Peninsula*, 7 October 2011, [www.thepeninsulaqatar.com](http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com))

A participatory study by Save the Children, UNICEF and Government of the North West Frontier Province in three districts of NWFP – Peshawar, Hangu and D.I.Khan – revealed that corporal punishment is widely used to discipline children in homes and educational institutions. A total of 155 consultations were undertaken, using participatory research techniques, with 3,582 children aged 6-14 years from government and religious schools, 86 consultations with 1,231 parents, and 86 consultations with 486 teachers. Not one child reported never having received corporal punishment. Cumulatively, the children identified 28 types of punishment used in homes and 43 in schools. The most common punishments at home were hitting with an object (shoe, brick, iron rod, knife, etc), smacking, kicking, punching, hair-pulling and ear-twisting. The most common in schools were smacking, hitting with an object, hair-pulling, ear-twisting, and awkward and humiliating physical positions. About 43% of all punishments identified were reported by children in government primary schools, about 30% in government middle schools, 10% in government high schools, and 16% in private schools. Corporal punishment at home and in schools was more frequent the younger the child. There were no significant gender differences – boys and girls were subjected to similar frequencies of punishment. Corporal punishment in homes was reported as being inflicted most frequently by immediate family members such as parents (20.22%), grandparents (24.04%) and older siblings (18.91%) and uncles and aunts (27.31%), followed by close relatives such as cousins and in-laws. Neighbours, village elders, tutors, housemaids and other relations were reported as less frequently beating children. Corporal punishment in schools was most commonly inflicted by the teacher and students assigned discipline duties in the school (49.6%), including class monitor, commander, and assembly commander. Senior students were also frequently reported to be hitting younger children (14.7%).

(April 2005, *Disciplining the Child: Practices and Impacts*, Save the Children/UNICEF/Schools and Literacy Dept, Government of NWFP)

A survey by the Pakistan Paediatrics Association and UNICEF, the results of which were published in March 2003, showed that more than four out of five children were vulnerable to physical abuse from parents, elders and teachers, with boys more likely than girls to suffer physical abuse.

(Cited in Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2004, *State of Human Rights 2003*)

## **SRI LANKA**

A study into institutional care in Sri Lanka found that corporal punishment and other cruel treatment occurred sometimes in institutions. The study recommended that corporal punishment of children in care be banned.

(Save the Children in Sri Lanka, 2005, *Home Truths: Children's Rights in Institutional Care in Sri Lanka*)