

The Impact of Corporal Punishment on Children

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I. Introduction

Around 1.1 billion (more than 1 in 4) caregivers admit to believing in the necessity of physical punishment as a form of discipline.¹ The statistics reveal the magnitude of this harmful practice and the extent of a misconception, believing that corporal punishment is an appropriate method to discipline a child. Using violence as a disciplinary method exposes children to violence in their everyday life. Ignoring the problem poses a serious threat to the wellbeing of children. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, highlights in his report as the independent expert for the United Nations on Violence Against Children, the “life-long” repercussions for abused children. “Violence leaves serious emotional and health impairments.”² Beating a child impacts his/her mental health and increases his/her likeliness to antisocial behavior. “A substantial body of research from the field of psychology and its allied disciplines indicates corporal punishment is ineffective as a disciplinary practice and can have unintended negative effects on children.”³ In general, children are the most exposed demographic group to violence, according to UNICEF’s 2017 report, “A Familiar Face”. The report also states that violent discipline and exposure to domestic abuse during childhood are the most common form of violence against children. In this sense, violent punishment at the household is a precursor to more violence.”⁴ Maltreated children absorb and internalize violence, normalizing it and replicating beyond the family network, on to society, and along to future generations perpetuating the cycle of violence.

¹ United Nations Children’s Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017. pp. 9

² Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio. "Rights of the child. Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children." (2006). pp. 12

³ Gershoff, Elizabeth T., and Susan H. Bitensky. "The case against corporal punishment of children: Converging evidence from social science research and international human rights law and implications for US public policy." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 13.4 (2007): 231.

⁴ Straus, M. A. (2001). *Beating the devil out of them: Corporal punishment in American families and its effects on children*. Piscataway, NJ, US: Transaction Publishers. pp. 19.

II. Context on Household Child Violence

This paper analyzes the global impact of household violent discipline on childhood, it examines the negative consequences on children's health, and the difficulties to prevent this unnoticed type of violence. We remit to the definition of "corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment," provided by the Committee on The Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8 (2006). For the purpose of delving deeper into age specific issues associated to different cognitive/developmental levels, the category "Childhood" (0-18 years) is divided in two: early childhood and adolescence. Case studies on "Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam" in the first segment, and "Adolescents Abuse" in the latter, are presented. We conclude with a policy recommendation that draws from the Critical Theories: knowledge is the key to create change, therefore, to expand child protection and prevent children from being subjected to violent discipline, the state has to promote "good parenting" and non-violent disciplinary methods. This would allow caregivers to understand the consequences of corporal punishment and learn of better alternatives to discipline their children.

The illustration below is meant to showcase the exposure to different types of violence as one moves through different states of childhood. In early childhood, common forms of violence include violent discipline or witnessing domestic violence. Later, into adolescence, more common forms of violence include intimate partner violence or bullying at school. This illustration is particularly interesting and aligned with this paper because it shows how child violence evolves from being within a home, into a school setting, and later into the larger community.

FIGURE 3.1: Exposure to violence through stages of childhood.



Source: Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

Source: Know Violence in Childhood, 2017

Definitions

- **Corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment**⁵: The Committee on The Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8 (2006)⁶ distinguishes:
 - a. Physical.** All corporal punishment as “*any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light*”. **Examples:** According to the Committee, this mostly involves hitting (“smacking”, “slapping”, “spanking”) children with the hand or with an implement (a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, or similar) but it can also involve, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children’s mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices).
 - b. On psychological:** Non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child. **Examples:** Shouting, yelling or screaming at a child, as well as calling a child offensive names such as ‘dumb’ or ‘lazy’.
- **Early & Middle Childhood**⁷: 0-4, 5-10 years.
- **Early & Late Adolescence**⁸: 10-14, 15-19 years.

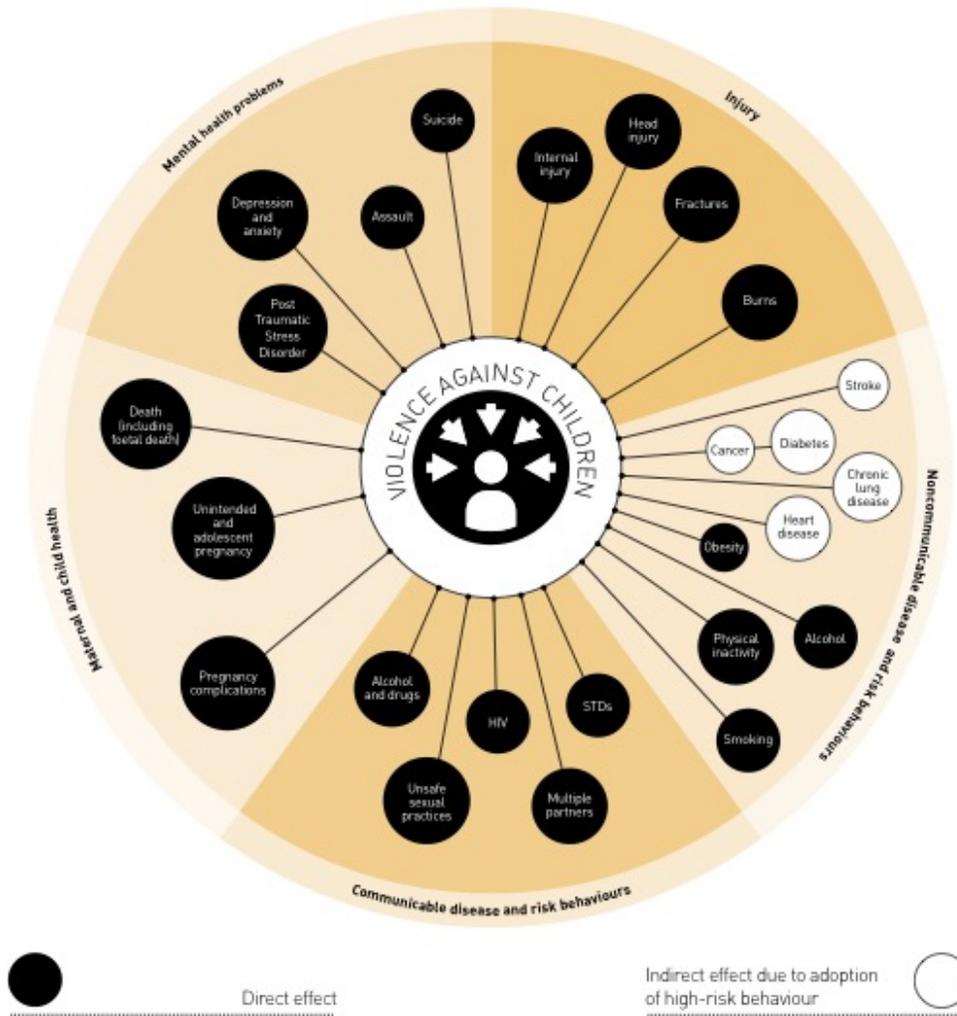
⁵ CRC/C/GC/8, Geneva, 2006

⁶ Seeking to address the global impact of corporal punishment and its harmful effects, as well as to improve the protection of the rights of the child, the Committee came up with a definition of “corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.”

⁷ For the purpose of this essay we use the definition Early & Middle Childhood by the Know Violence in Childhood. “*Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017,*” because it distinguishes two main stages in childhood. pp. 42-46

⁸ Idem, for Early and Late Adolescence, pp. 46-48

Potential health consequences of violence against children



Much of this violence and its enormous impact can be prevented through programmes that address its root causes and risk factors.

Violence arises from an interplay of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors, and these four levels represent key entry points for the INSPIRE strategies. Gender norms are a key society-level factor that make children and adolescents vulnerable to violence; they can reinforce the low status of girls and women in society and increase the likelihood that boys and men perpetrate violence.

Source: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children (Executive Summary)

As the graph above indicates, there are countless ramifications of household violence in a child’s life. Some include increasing the risk of communicable diseases, injury, and several mental health problems. The graph also shows through black versus white spheres what are the

direct effects of corporal punishment, versus indirect effects. This also illustrates how parents are not always aware of the huge impact their having in their child's life, and some of these effects are irreversible.

III. Convention on the Rights of the Child – Background & Context

Raising children with violent methods disobeys the rights and dignity of a child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, establishes through article 19, that authorities shall “protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence while in the care of their parents or any other person who has the care of the child.”⁹ Furthermore, article 37 of the CRC highlights that no child shall be subjected to “cruel” or “degrading” treatment or punishment.¹⁰ The CRC has been ratified by 195 countries, making it the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history,¹¹ yet, violent discipline remains condoned by state authorities because it's considered a culturally accepted practice. For instance, 76 percent of countries have laws against corporal punishment, but only 30 percent enforce them.¹² The Committee on the Rights of the Child has “noted with great concern the widespread legality and persisting social approval of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment of children.”¹³ In this context of impunity and permissibility, it becomes very difficult to safeguard the enjoyment of

⁹ Art. 19. “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”

¹⁰ Article 37. “States Parties shall ensure that: (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;”

¹¹ “UN lauds Somalia as country ratifies landmark children’s rights treaty”, UN News, 20 January 2015. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2015/01/488692-un-lauds-somalia-country-ratifies-landmark-childrens-rights-treaty>

¹² Bissell, Susan, et. all. “Chapter 6: Expanding The Child Protection Paradigm”, pp. 6

¹³ Committee on The Rights of the Child, General Comment. No. 8 (2006), para. 4

the above-mentioned rights (19 & 37) and the protection of children against violent discipline.

IV. Impact of Corporal Punishment in Households

Spanking children or calling them offensive names tends to be viewed by parents lightly. Corporal punishment or name calling are argued by parents as necessary means to restrain a child's active body and playful mind- characteristics that are intrinsic to the nature of childhood. The household environment is where most violent punishment happens, under the care of their most trusted individuals.¹⁴ The Special Report of the independent expert for the United Nations on violence against children points that "the majority of violent acts experienced by children is perpetrated by people who are part of their lives."¹⁵ In such circumstances, children's exposure to violence is prolonged, as it happens in the private sphere of the household, making it even more difficult to account and prevent.¹⁶ Unlike children, adults, have the cognitive capacities to reason and comprehend that there are better ways to discipline a child than with violence. Nonetheless, many caregivers are unaware that corporal punishment is ineffective as a discipline tool, nor they know the fear and distress it leaves on their children.¹⁷ If parents would listen to their children and communicate effectively, better results would be obtained. Here lies the key. By socializing new understandings of non-violent discipline techniques, states would promote a shift in the subjective perceptions of what is "normal" or "acceptable". Likewise, caregivers would stop assuming they have the right to hit their children for the sake of being their legal guardians. Therefore, State should use all appropriate legislative measures to produce and

¹⁴ UNICEF, A Familiar Face, 2017, pp. 21

¹⁵ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio. "Rights of the child. Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children." (2006). pp. 9

¹⁶ UNICEF, A Familiar Face, 2017, pp. 19 -21

¹⁷ Twentyman, Craig T., and Ron C. Plotkin. "Unrealistic expectations of parents who maltreat their children: An educational deficit that pertains to child development." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 38.3 (1982): 497-503. pp. 501

disseminate knowledge to prevent children from being violently punished, as this has negative consequences on their health and is a violation of their rights.

V. Early & Middle Childhood

A. The Prevalence of Violence in Households

As stated earlier, the early childhood stage occurs between 0-4 years of age, followed by the middle childhood stage, which occurs between 5-10 years of age. These two milestones in childhood are crucial when considering violence within the household because they mark ages when children are still not fully vocal, and cannot express their opinions or reactions the same way adults do. Thus, children in this stage of life are most likely taken advantage of, since they are “mute” to an extent. Despite the CRC recognizing the authority of the parents to discipline their children, the CRC also clearly outlines the boundary between disciplining and using violent methods like corporal or psychological punishment which are harmful to the wellbeing of the children and degrading. The line between discipline and violent discipline must be drawn to ensure that all children have the same opportunity to grow without developmental or emotional delays. Moreover, “younger children are at greater risk of corporal punishment than adolescents, with the incidence of corporal punishment at age 8 more than double the rate reported by 15-year-olds.” This provides evidence that there should be an increase in policies addressing early preventative measures within the household and other intimate settings, since this is the stage of childhood with the highest corporal punishment rates.

A. Case Study - Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam

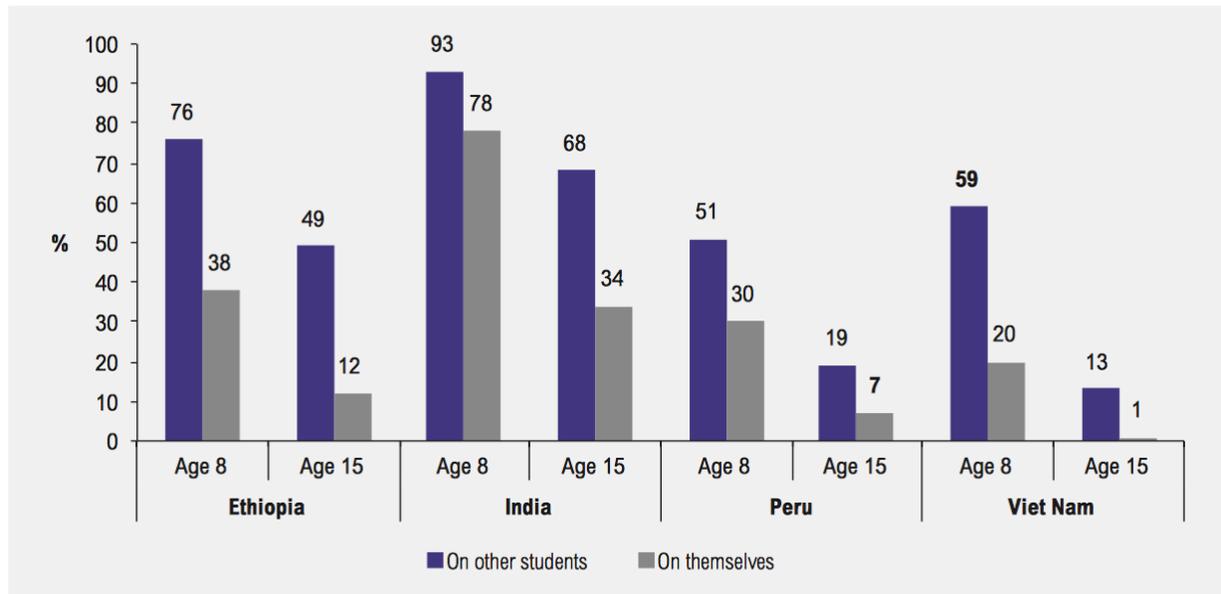
It’s important to note that there are significant gaps in the research concerning childhood experiences from the Global South. Even though there has been a lot of quantitative research particularly shedding a light on extreme situations, such as female genital mutilation, this has

cast a shadow over hidden forms of violence. Such hidden forms of violence are often pushed to the side since most researches focus their efforts on “at-risk” youth, such as child soldiers and street children. Even though such research provides important insight into how children navigate violence within their life, it doesn’t play special notice to the interconnections of structural violence. The 2018 report “Children’s experiences of violence: Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam”, explores the systematic violence that is often overlooked in children’s lives. This study also recognizes that children violence must be researched through longitudinal data, as this reveals how early childhood experiences shape other outcomes and trajectories later in life.¹⁸

Young Lives study followed children Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam for 15 years. It was found that children in these four countries receive corporal punishment by teachers at school.

¹⁸ Pells, K., Morrow, G. (2018) *Children’s experiences of violence: Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam* Summative Report. Oxford: Young Lives.

Figure 1: Children's self-reports of teachers' use of physical punishment in the past week at ages 8 and 15 (2009)



Source: Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015: 18

Source: Ogando Portella and Pels, 2015: 18

The graph above shows self-reports by children within these four countries who stated that their teachers used violence within the classroom setting. “Among children aged eight: over half in Peru and Viet Nam, three quarters in Ethiopia and over nine in ten in India reported witnessing a teacher administering corporal punishment in the last week (see Figure 1).”¹⁹ During this stage of middle childhood, children who are being exposed to violence within the school-setting internalize that this is an acceptable disciplinary method that can be used in society. Teachers, who act as secondary authoritative roles, after parents, are embodying a different kind of corporal punishment. In a way, you can consider violence within the classroom being tightly interlinked with violence within households, since a class is supposed to be a safe space for a

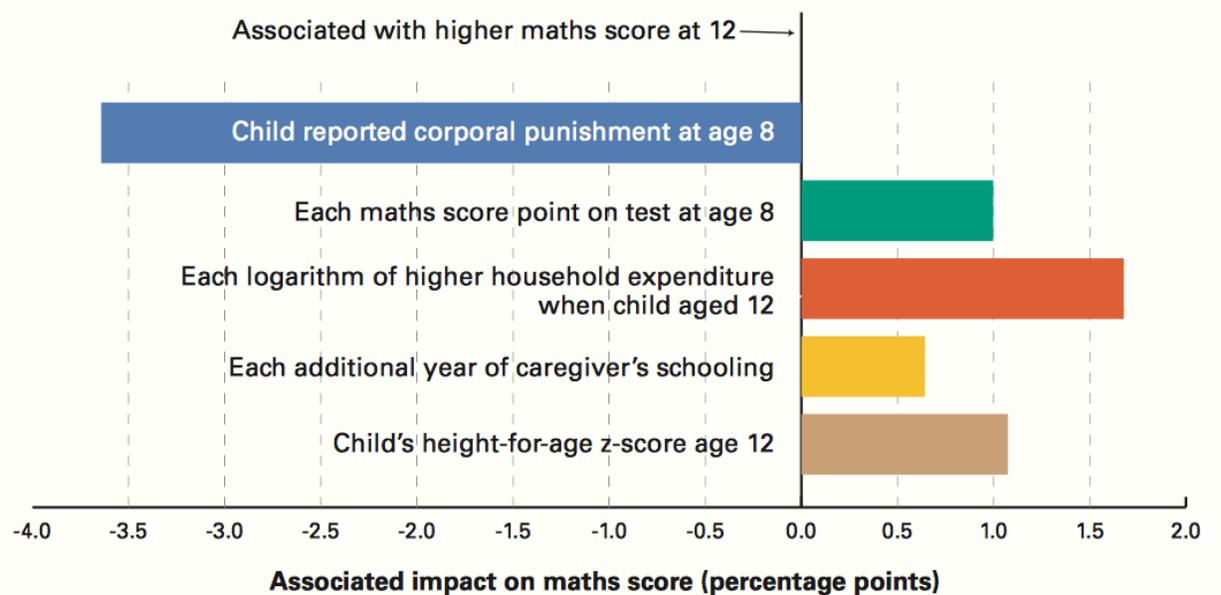
¹⁹ Pells, K., Morrow, G. (2018) *Children's experiences of violence: Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam* Summative Report. Oxford: Young Lives.

child where he/she learns and grows. If this setting becomes corrupted by violence, an essential part of a child's everyday life and routine is altered.

Violence at school severely undermines children's learning. "At age 8 corporal punishment is negatively associated with children's math's scores, in all four countries, even after controlling for a range of child and household characteristics and when comparing children in the same community. The results also remain significant in Ethiopia, India and Vietnam after controlling for previous performance in math at age 5."²⁰ Even more so, violence within the classroom setting is specific to the middle childhood stage in life, but has repercussions into adolescence. "These negative effects persist when examining children's test scores at age 12. In India, Peru and Vietnam corporal punishment experienced at age 8 is negatively associated with maths scores at age 12" (Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015). This shows how the decline of test scores can be linked to classroom violence that was inflicted previously.

²⁰ Ibid.

Figure 2 - What factors predict children's maths scores at age 12 years? (Viet Nam)



Source: Hayley Jones and KIRRILY Pells. "Undermining Learning: Multi-Country Longitudinal Evidence on Corporal Punishment in Schools." *Innocenti Research Brief*, vol. 6, 2016.

Figure 2 shows the findings specific to Vietnam. "Bars to the right of the central axis show factors associated with higher maths scores at age 12 and bars to the left with lower maths scores. The length of the bar is the average size of the associated effect. The figure predicts that holding other factors constant, if a child reported being beaten at age 8 this was associated with a score on average of 3.6 percentage points lower on the maths test at age 12. The negative average effect associated with corporal punishment is equivalent to the effect associated with a child having a caregiver with approximately five fewer years of education."²¹

Furthermore, there are even larger implications of classroom violence for poor children. "Poor children being more likely to be subject to corporal punishment in schools. Lack of

²¹ Hayley Jones and KIRRILY Pells. (2016). Undermining learning: Multi-country longitudinal evidence on corporal punishment in schools. *Innocenti Research Brief*, 6

materials for school meant that children are punished by teachers: as a boy, aged 7, India, said: “If we don’t get [buy and bring] notebooks, then teachers will beat us.” A mother of a 7 year old girl in India said the only thing her daughter said about school was that her teacher beat her.” Teachers physically discipline children who don’t have the means to buy the materials for class, or show up with their uniform torn or dirty. The experiences of poor children also impact interpersonal relationships at school. Children describe being verbally abused due to their appearance and clothes –which serve as indicators of economic status and wellbeing. The most common impact of such verbal abuse is children wanting to stay at home. “Children’s interactions, including bullying, therefore do not take place in a vacuum but may be shaped by wider inequalities that discriminate against certain groups. For example, in India, children recounted how teachers beat children who were ‘dirty’ or irregular in attending school. Children adopted and used similar expressions, stating that they wanted to beat children who were not in school to teach them a lesson.”²²

Taking this specific case study, which provides insight into the middle stage of childhood in India, Peru, Ethiopia and Viet Nam, it’s clear that violence within the school setting continues to re-establish corporal punishment within child’s lives. “Violence in schools, including physical and verbal abuse by teachers and peers, is the foremost reason children aged 8 give for disliking school, ranging from 26 per cent in India, to 38 per cent in Peru, 42 per cent in Ethiopia and 53 per cent in Viet Nam.”²³ Hidden forms of violence like bullying or emotional abuse are often overlooked in research, but can have huge implications for the rest of the child’s life. Such forms

²² Pells, K., Morrow, G. (2018) *Children’s experiences of violence: Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam* Summative Report. Oxford: Young Lives.

²³ Hayley Jones and Kirrily Pells. (2016). Undermining learning: Multi-country longitudinal evidence on corporal punishment in schools. *Innocenti Research Brief*, 6

of violence are commonplace within school settings, which is why focusing efforts on longitudinal research in this environment provides insight into the distress caused by child violence. Moreover, it's of utmost importance that the societal view of children should shift from one that sees them as passive victims, to one that identifies children as active participants of their lives.

B. Policy Implications

There are multiple strategies that can be implemented to ensure that the risk of violence within the household and classroom setting is minimized. "Policies developed at the national level to create safe and enabling school environments need to be adapted to the specific needs and challenges encountered at the local and school level."²⁴ There must be a central school governance "with guidelines and action plans on eliminating violence in schools, including corporal punishment, developed and enforced with the support of teachers, parents and children."²⁵ Children also need to have a safe confidential way to report instances of violence, without being threatened in doing so. School-level interventions must also be supplemented by a wider change in the educative system, which could include wide teacher training and budgetary allocations to create safe school settings. Teachers need to be trained towards positive disciplinary methods, and be equipped with classroom management techniques. Finally, systemic change will only happen if there is international attention to the problem. Within the Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4 on education access and quality includes a target to: 'Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-

²⁴ Hayley Jones and Kirrily Pells. (2016). Undermining learning: Multi-country longitudinal evidence on corporal punishment in schools. *Innocenti Research Brief*, 6

²⁵ Ibid.

violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all'. National plans and budgets that ensure the implementation of this goal is crucial to prevent violent discipline within childhood.

VI. Early & Late Adolescence

A. Transitioning and Gender Differentiation

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines adolescence as “the period of life when a child develops into an adult. The period from puberty to maturity, terminating legally at the age of majority.”²⁶ For the ages encompassed in adolescence, we refer to the definition provided in the Methodology section. Based on developmental psychology, it covers children from 10 to 19 years, dividing it in “Early Adolescence”, ages are 10-14, and “Late Adolescence,” 15-19 years old²⁷. During these periods of deep transformation, the developmental milestones a child goes through, transition him/her from immaturity to maturity, from incapacity to capacity, until adulthood is reached. During this process, child protection systems and the national and international legal framework that guarantees the rights of children must adapt to the new challenges and threats that adolescents face. However, this rarely happens. Childhood tends to be seen as an ample category with general coverage, but adolescents have special needs and face specific risks that differ from those at early childhood.

Puberty brings changes to children’s bodies, physical and cognitive capacities and agency, but also exposure, especially with respect to other forms of violence and sexuality.²⁸ “Key aspects of development during the intensification of gender socialization and gender roles occurs around puberty.”²⁹ It’s at this moment too, that the experiences for boys and girls begin to

²⁶ "Adolescence." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 5 May 2018.

²⁷ From the “Know Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017”, pp. 46-48

²⁸ Know Violence 2017, pp. 46

²⁹ Hill J.P., Lynch M.E. (1983) The Intensification of Gender-Related Role Expectations during Early Adolescence. In: Brooks-Gunn J., Petersen A.C. (eds) *Girls at Puberty*. Springer, Boston, MA pp. 216

diverge. In general, boys are at greater risk of physical violence than girls, but girls are more vulnerable to suffer sexual violence. Pinhero points at these gender differentiations comparing the probability of girls being 3 times more likely to be sexually abused than males.³⁰ Also, it has been noted that boys are more likely than girls to be physically attacked or suffer intentional and unintentional injuries.³¹ A case study from the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana regions in India supports these statements, “boys report higher levels of violent discipline than girls, both at home and at school.”³²

It is important to disaggregate data by age and sex at this decisive turning point of childhood. By age, because the cognitive and physical development of a child, for instance, aged 5, is radically different than of another aged 15. It’s also important to differentiate by gender, because the vulnerabilities and types of the violence are distinct in boys and girls. Moreover, societies are profoundly gendered and expectations stemming from gender roles effect nearly every aspect of life from infancy onward.³³ Gender roles accentuate as children turn into adolescents. “As girl teens get older, many lose their freedoms and their world shrinks, at the same time, boys seem to enjoy more freedom as they mature, but they lose the nurturing and support of their parents.”³⁴ This differences in age and gender contribute to health disparities. Young boys are more prone to die by interpersonal violence, while on the contrary, the leading cause of death in girl adolescents is associated with maternal conditions.³⁵

³⁰ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio. "Rights of the child. Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children." (2006). pp. 15

³¹ UNICEF, A Familiar Face, 2017, pp. 72

³² Morrow, V. and R. Singh (2016) pp. 18

³³ Saewyc, Elizabeth, “A Global Perspective on Gender Roles and Identity.” *Journal of Adolescent Health* , Volume 61, Issue 4 , S1 - S2

³⁴ The Global Early Adolescent Study is an international study with the goal of understanding the factors in early adolescence that predispose young people to subsequent sexual health risks and promote healthy sexuality, so as to provide the information needed to promote sexual and reproductive well-being. (GEAS, Web page, Accessed April 2018 at: <http://www.geastudy.org>

³⁵ UNICEF, A Familiar Face, 2017, pp 55

Therefore, this distinction is necessary because the type of violence (eg. corporal, psychological, sexual) varies according to age and sex. Gender Based Violence “is the violence perpetrated as a result of normative role expectations associated with male and female gender identities, along with the unequal power relationships between genders.”³⁶ All violent acts aimed to affirm and enforce predominant concepts of masculinity or femininity are considered GVB.³⁷ To clarify, Intimate partner violence was excluded of this analysis because the perpetrator of the violence is other than the parents or legal guardian. Although intimate partner violence might occur in the household and the aims are also disciplinary, the interest of this paper focuses in parent-child relations exclusively.

Generally speaking, the perpetrators of sexual violence on adolescent boys and girls, also differ from the parents. In the Violence Against Children Surveys, the main perpetrators for sexual abuse against boys were neighbors, schoolmates and friends, whereas 45–77% of sexual violence against girls was perpetrated by a romantic or intimate partner.³⁸ However, data from UNICEF’s “A Familiar Face” 2017 report, reveal that “children in many places are at great risk of exposure to sexual violence within the context of close relationships such as those with the family, friends, and intimate partners.”³⁹ A caveat, --sexual violence is rarely used as a violent disciplinary method on adolescents. Most compelling evidence show that violent discipline in adolescents becomes more psychological than physical.⁴⁰ (See Figure 3.2) This is explained because teenagers develop physical strength and can defend themselves better. A report by the

³⁶ Abadi, Rita. “Violence against children: trafficking, sexual assault, and other types of violence.” April 2018. pp. 7

³⁷ Idem, pp. 3

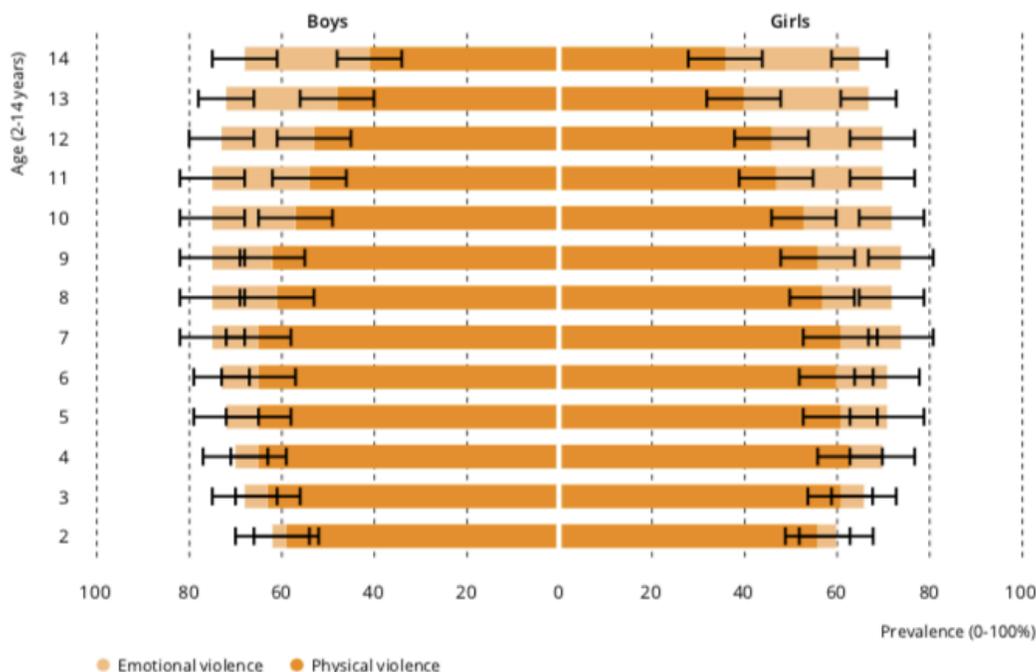
³⁸ Know Violence, 2017 pp. 48

³⁹ UNICEF, A Familiar Face 2017, pp. 75

⁴⁰ Know Violence, 2017 pp. 39

World Health Organization, points in this direction, “adolescents are frequently subjected to psychological harm by parents who are excessively critical or manipulative.”⁴¹

FIGURE 3.2: Children suffer high levels of emotional and physical violence at the hands of their caregivers, 2-14 years.



Notes: Data sources: Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). Model shows caregivers reports of physical aggression by household members. To read bar graph: age of the child is on the y-axis; prevalence of each form of violence is on the x axis. Prevalence corresponds to the distance of the bar along the x-axis for boys (to the left), and girls (to the right). Forms of violence are overlaid; and the black bars are a 95% confidence interval. For example, for girls aged 2 years, the prevalence of physical violence is 56% (95%CI 49-63%), and the prevalence of emotional violence is 60% (95%CI 52-68%).

Source: Devries and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

Source: Know Violence in Childhood, 2017

Correspondingly, in early childhood the risk of violent discipline by the parents is higher than in adolescence, “with 55–60% of girls and boys experiencing physical violence from a caregiver or household member at age 2. Levels decline by age 14 to about 35–40% of boys and girls,”⁴² but psychological violence starts to replace corporal punishment as children grow. Another

⁴¹ WHO, “Helping parents in developing countries improve adolescents’ health.” 2007, pp. 5

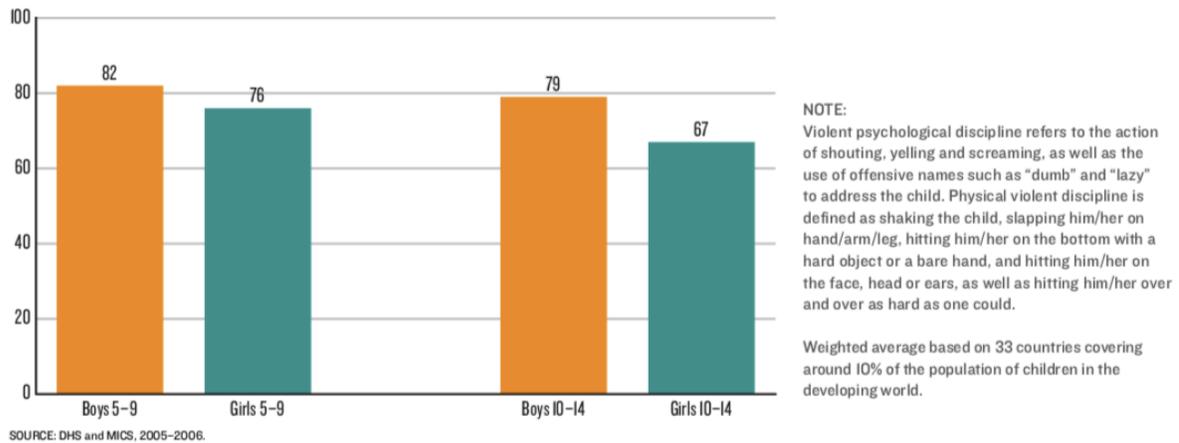
⁴² Know Violence. 2017, pp. 44

interesting comparison, comes from UNICEF’s 2011 report, “Boys and Girls in the Life Cycle,” were an insight on sex-disaggregated data and the issue of violent punishment is provided. The graph below (Figure 25) shows that while boys and girls under five are equally likely to experience violent discipline, boys are slightly more likely than girls to be subjected to such methods after age five, and the gender gap increases with age.⁴³

Figure 25

Boys are slightly more likely to receive violent discipline than girls and gender gaps increase with age, in selected countries with available data

Percentage of children 5–14 years old who receive violent discipline (psychological and/or physical), by sex



Source: UNICEF, “Boys and Girls in the Life Cycle: Sex-disaggregated data on a selection of well-being indicators, from early childhood to young adulthood.”

With regards to the setting where violence takes places, there are also differences with early childhood. Exposure to physical violence occurs in other environment than the household,

⁴³ Cappa, Claudia and Murray, Colleen. “Boys and Girls in the Life Cycle: Sex-disaggregated data on a selection of well-being indicators, from early childhood to young adulthood” UNICEF, New York, 2011. pp. 14

and the aim is not necessarily disciplinary as per the parent-children relation. Maturity allows children to become independent and detach from the sphere of protection of the household. In the outside, young males confront community or school violence. For instance, the community is where most violent deaths of male adolescents happen.⁴⁴ The rate of homicides for this segment of the population (male/adolescent) is remarkably high in Latin America and The Caribbean.⁴⁵ Other causes of non-disciplinary violence that affect adolescents outside their homes are, bullying at school, crime, gangs, or suicide.

All things considered, poverty and inequality must also be mentioned with regards to violent discipline of children in the household as they are one of the underlying causes of violence. Poor families are more likely to suffer material deprivations and the anxiety associated with it. While violent discipline is not a phenomenon exclusively associated to any particular class or race, there is a correlation between household income and children exposure to abuse. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study relied on quantitative data from over 13.494 patients to find a relationship of causality between childhood abuse and household dysfunction. “Baseline data from the study was used to provide an overview of the prevalence and interrelation of exposures to child abuse and household dysfunction.”⁴⁶ On the whole, poverty and inequality invariably influence dysfunctionality at home. Manifestations of household dysfunctionality can be substance abuse, mental illness, mother treated violently or criminal behavior. Abused children exposed to these categories were at higher risk of suffering health problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, or suicide, among others.⁴⁷ These extremely

⁴⁴ UNICEF, *A Familiar Face*, 2017, pp. 7

⁴⁵ The highest homicide rates among male adolescents aged 10 to 19, as of 2015, are in the following world ranking, Venezuela, Honduras, Colombia, El Salvador, Brazil. (UNICEF, *A Familiar Face*, pp. 7)

⁴⁶ Felitti, et al. “ACE Study” 1998, pp. 246

⁴⁷ *Idem*, pp. 250

vulnerable children are labeled “polyvictims.” The term refers to those children who suffer “multiple victimizations of different kinds, such as sexual abuse, violent discipline, bullying, and exposure to domestic violence, emphasizing different kinds of victimization, rather than just multiple episodes of the same kind of violence.”⁴⁸

Violent discipline on young children or adolescents cause profound damages on their physical and mental health. Damage that is very difficult to treat and that might last a life time. Moreover, violent discipline contributes to the perpetuation of the cycle of violence. When children are disciplined with violence, probabilities are he or she will replicate the same attitudes towards other. For instance, children who perceived their parents as authoritarian, punitive and unsupportive bully others at school or engage in gang violence.⁴⁹ Also, the likeliness that these children will become aggressors to other women is exponentially higher when they were disciplined with violence at home. A case study by UNICEF found, that “violence is seen as an acceptable way to respond to ‘transgressions’ by young women and girls, who are subjected to specific forms of patriarchal violence underpinned by strong gender norms. Boys and men perpetrate much of the violence experienced by girls.”⁵⁰ The experience of corporal punishment in childhood is associated with inequitable gender attitudes and behavior as an adult. Another study of men in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, Mexico and Rwanda found that “men who had experienced violence including corporal punishment as boys were more likely to hold inequitable gender attitudes later, be involved in fights outside the home or robberies, pay for sex and

⁴⁸ Finkelhor, et all. “Polyvictimization: Children’s exposure to multiple types of violence crime and abuse” 2011, pp. 4

⁴⁹ Know Violence in Children, pp. 20

⁵⁰ Morrow, V. and R. Singh (2016). Understanding Children’s Experiences of Violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India: Evidence from Young Lives, *Innocenti Working Paper* 2016-19, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence. pp. 8

experience low self-esteem and depression, and were less likely to participate in domestic duties, and communicate openly with their partners.”⁵¹

In conclusion, international human rights law requires states to prohibit all corporal punishment of girls and boys, including in the family home because those adverse childhood experiences have a direct link with health risks. Yet, the lack of national law that specifically protect adolescents signals that violent discipline against them will continue to be considered as necessary and inconsequential. It is perhaps, in preventive measures like training parents of adolescents in good parenting techniques and encouraging communication, that child protection will be expanded.

B. Case Study: “Adolescent Abuse”⁵²

Teens in the United States have rates of abuse and neglect that are as high or higher than those of young children, --much of it at the hands of family members. “Nearly 25% of reported child maltreated in the United States involves victims who are 12 to 17 years old.”⁵³ However, much of the abuse of adolescents is unaccounted and underreported in this country. The case study, “Adolescent Abuse” refers to this phenomenon. “The tendency for authorities to minimize the significance of a report of abuse or offer punishment rather than help seems particularly likely when the abuse victim is not a helpless child but an adolescent.”⁵⁴ Despite adolescents having stronger bodies to defend themselves, as well as improved cognitive capacities (agency) to report abuses, the legal system is biased against them. It considers adolescents the provokers

⁵¹ Prohibiting corporal punishment of girls and boys – a key element in ending gender-based violence.” pp. 5

⁵² Foreman, Susan, and Linda Seligman. "Adolescent abuse." *The School Counselor* 31.1 (1983): 17-25. pp. 21

⁵³ MIT, “Abuse of Teens, first do no harm.” Accessed May 2018, at: <http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/raising-teens/abuse-of-teens.html>

⁵⁴ Foreman and Seligman 1983, pp. 17

of the violence and parents the disciplinary authority. The study found that 22 out of the 24 abusive incidents studied at a public welfare office, were immediately preceded by the adolescent either disobeying or arguing with the parent.⁵⁵ “The automatic assumption that the adolescent is the provoker and the parent the disciplinarian authority cloud the distinction between punishment and abuse.”⁵⁶ The authors point that in many situations the courts are not impartial when dealing with cases of parent-adolescent violence. There is an underlying myth that adolescents cannot be victims because they are neither innocent nor helpless, as is a little 5-year old, coupled with their physical force to respond with violence to their abusers. “Adolescents need for self-protection leads to aggressive retaliation towards the parents.”⁵⁷ All in all, the authoritative role of parents over children is one that is accepted by society, and even further propagates the criminalization of adolescents.

VII. Conclusion

Ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child ensures that each state within this agreement must ensure child protection. Even so, child violence, starting within the household setting, remains to be a socially accepted practice. Due to its intergenerational and cultural nature, ensuring that all nation states punish those who enforce corporal punishment on children becomes very problematic and controversial. Parents play a vital role within this cycle of child violence, since they embody the authoritative figure that has legal rights above the child. There should be a shift towards ensuring that parents listen to their children and discipline through non-violent methods. Therefore, this paper recommends that more policy organization should be established around alternative parenting measures. The two case studies outline in the paper, one

⁵⁵ Idem, pp. 18

⁵⁶ Idem, pp. 18

⁵⁷ Idem, pp. 19

focusing on classroom violence within the middle stage of childhood and the other focused on adolescent treatment within the legal system, highlight how children face unique challenges as they transition from one developmental period to another. Even more so, the participation of children within new policies plays a vital role. Children who are able to report abuse and receive counseling will most likely recover from corporal punishment, and will allow children to evolve from a silent victim to an active participant. The CRC (in article 12) also requires states to enable children to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, and to give their views due consideration. Therefore, there should be an increased effort towards hearing children's stories of violent discipline as they transition from early childhood into late adolescence.

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