



School corporal punishment in Egypt

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Abstract

School corporal punishment (SCP) against students in Egypt is officially forbidden; however it is being widely used in public and private schools. This large gap between current education policy that bans corporal punishment (CP) and actual policy implementation could be attributed to both family-based and school-based factors. This research was conducted as a part of an MA thesis which aimed at finding out why corporal punishment is being practiced widely in Egyptian schools. Teachers, parents and recent-graduate students were surveyed about the use of CP as a tool for discipline. The findings indicate that CP is highly correlated on one hand to family acceptance through practicing CP at home against children, lack of parental reporting of teachers perpetrating it, and sometimes encouraging teachers to practice it. On the other hand, CP is correlated to school administrative acceptance through having school principals themselves practice CP, tolerate teachers perpetrating it, failure to respond to parents' complaints by taking action with teachers.

Keywords: school, student, violence, corporal, punishment, education

1. Introduction

Current policy in Egypt prohibits the use of SCP both from the teacher and the student (ministerial decree 591, 1998). The policy states that all kinds of CP applied on students are completely forbidden otherwise the teacher should be answerable legally. According to article 2 in the decree, the student should be totally expelled in case of any assault on a teacher. Since the policy was issued till 2000, a number of 90 students have been expelled also due to violent acts against teachers. However, no record tells us if the school administrators applied any legal sanction on teachers punishing students physically ever since the policy was issued. On the other hand, during academic year 2005/2006, 80 teachers were suspended in reaction to parents' complaints submitted against them through the Child Help Line 16000 (SRC, 2014). There are also some cases with criminal dimension and have been highlighted by media and newspapers like cases of serious injuries or death.

Although current policy concerning violence in schools states that CP is banned (ministerial decree 591, 1998), we find that it is being widely practiced in schools as a common tool for discipline (Nasr, 2004) ^[9] with barely parents' objection or reporting it. However, reporting is usually for extreme cases with serious injuries or even death of children that are published to the public such as the death of a child in one of Alexandria schools as a result of a teacher's beating (Aly, 2008). There is little record on child abuse or child death resulting from violence and the Ministry of Interior's reports encompass a total number of only 265 cases reported between 2000 and 2003 which denotes great underreporting for the issue (SRC, 2014).

This research investigates *to what extent CP is widespread in schools in spite of its legal ban? Is it equally applied between*

public and private schools? What are the reasons for practicing physical punishment in schools? What are the consequences of these practices? The paper highlights the spread of CP in private and public schools and the approval of this practice from the viewpoint of teachers, recent-graduate students, and parents through exploring their reactions and how they perceive corporal punishment. This paper argues that students act violently in reaction to violence they encounter in school by teachers which is approved and supported by parental violence at home. The paper does not victimize students or criminalize teachers, but it aims at demonstrating objectively a new aspect of the issue by highlighting the causes and consequences of corporal punishment practiced against students from a policy-based perspective.

2. Literature Review

Previous research does not provide us with adequate data on SCP; however, the topic had been approached in Egypt from social and psychological views such as reports and publications issued by UNICEF and WHO (2009) ^[14], and from legal and policy-based approaches such as studies made by the National Center for Educational Research and the National Center for Social and Criminal research. The majority of research work addressing school violence in general had focused either on students' violence against each other or against teachers but none of them approached the reasons why would students act violently in the first place. Some of the reasons that feed corporal punishment in schools could be either family-based or school-based. Concerning the family-based factors, Zayed (2007) ^[18] proposed in a study that Egyptian families use corporal punishment as the only method of reforming children's behavior and raising them up.

Zayed added that 90% of the study sample confirmed exposure to punishment in school and 42% confirmed exposure to CP in home while percentage of violence *from* students does not exceed 30% (National Criminal Magazine, 2007)^[18] which means that violence practiced *against* students is still much more intense than violence practiced by them. Additionally, in a study made by the Social Research Center (2006) in the academic year prior to the study, 81% of the study sample children are being physically punished at homes. Research findings reveal that teachers and parents who used to be physically punished at early age are highly likely to use it and approve of its use when they grow (Jehle, 2004)^[5]. Traditionally, parents who think of CP as being the only tool for discipline do not usually object to teachers beating their children at school (Jehle, 2004)^[5].

Other reasons for spreading CP in schools could be school-based factors. Previous studies state that 96% of children are beaten in school (SRC, 2006)^[12]. Since the school administration represents the main context in which CP exist, Salama finds that poor school administration and fluctuation between being too lenient or too restrict with students triggers violence among students and, in turn, raises CP rate they receive to correct their behavior (Salama 2000)^[10]. When the school administration deals passively with parents' complaints or disregard them, parents resort to acting violently against teachers (SRC, 2006)^[12]. Past research indicated that schools that regularly summon parents have shown much lesser use of CP than schools which do not incorporate parents in child discipline (Guepet, 2002)^[4]. The school principals are considered mediators between educational authorities and teachers; and are expected to control means of discipline used in the school (Chiang, 2009)^[2].

It is evident that teachers are not trained enough on how to discipline students without using CP (Moussa & Al Ayesh, 2009)^[8]. This could be traced to the dominant culture that considers CP as being the most common way to maintain teachers' respect (Salama, 2000)^[10]. Apparently, teachers would not summon parents due to their mistrust in teachers which fosters disrespect from students (SRC, 2006)^[12]. Along with absence of social worker's role in school to reform students' behavior, organizing activities and caring about students' problems, teachers are obliged to take over the responsibility of reforming students' behavior in addition to educating them (Abdel Aziz, 2005)^[1].

The consequences of SCP as past research work informs first that violence is reciprocating; statistics shows a positive relation between students' violent acts against teachers and other students; and CP rate they receive (Nasr, 2004)^[9]. In other words, a percentage of 58% of students that are corporally punished in schools are those who reflected the highest violence rates than other students especially in public schools (Nasr, 2004)^[9]. Some violent acts that students exhibit to vent out their anger may include damaging school properties, writing on walls, tearing school flyers, and beating their colleagues (Nasr, 2004)^[9]. It could be inferred that although CP is used in schools with the purpose of controlling the students' behavior and discipline, previous studies prove that it causes an adverse effect and causes student's deferral from school and failure (Shehab, 2004)^[11], magnifies school dropouts (Mansour & Khalil, 2008)^[6] & (Soliman, 2003)^[13],

and damage to school assets (Moussa & Al Ayesh, 2009)^[8]. Far from physical and social damages, CP causes psychological damages that are reflected obviously on child's low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence, besides having other negative long-term personality disorders (UNICEF, 2007)^[15,16].

Efforts to Combat Corporal Punishment in Schools in Egypt include the project of Community-based Child Protection Pilot Project in Alexandria which started in 2007 which is considered one of the most effective projects launched by the Save the Children organization with the purpose of investigating, preventing, and reporting violations of child rights as stated in article 19 including erosion of SCP. In this regard, the project managed to activate the role of social workers in schools, train teachers for alternative techniques for discipline, and hold sessions to parents and students to raise their awareness of child rights. The project works closely with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Family and Population.

Later, the UNICEF adopted the Child Protection Project launched in 2010 which is still active till present in a few districts in Cairo and Alexandria. The project works in alignment with non-governmental associations to investigate and identify children at risk, educational and health needs, violence acts and child abuse. On a broader level, the General Directorate for Social Education implemented an effective program called Education for Parents with the purpose of meeting and discussing with parents and adolescent children best approaches of dealing with children other than violent methods; along with the program of Protecting Youth from the Risks of Addiction under the auspices of National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (SRC, 2006)^[12].

3. Methodology and Data Collection

The scope of the empirical research basically relied on data collection from all stakeholders involved in CP: teachers, parents, and non-minor young people who recently finished their school work. This helps us link between how past experiences with physical punishment would affect current behavior and how current behavior may trigger further practices of violence with future generations besides exploring how family and school administration would fuel the use of CP. The methodology is designed to answer basic research questions listed above: *What are the reasons and consequences of practicing physical punishment in schools? How it is being viewed by teachers, parents and students?*

The research sampling plan would be: teachers, parents and children. The number of observations targeted was 100 usable questionnaires of each category and a total of 300 surveys. The study targeted students who have just finished their school work (i.e. between 18 and 20 years old) and parents of children currently enrolled in school besides school teachers. The teacher sample included approximately equal numbers of those teaching in public and private schools to compare and contrast practices and attitudes in each school type.

The research hypotheses of this study were extracted from our main research questions to suggest prospective answers to the following questions: to what extent is CP spread in public and private schools; why corporal punishment is applied in schools despite of the legal ban of it; and what are the effects

of CP? Research questions and Hypotheses are:

Q1: To what extent is corporal punishment applied in public and private schools?

H1: Private schools differ from public schools in using corporal punishment

H2: School administrative acceptance increase CP against students

H3: Social acceptance represented by parental consent increase CP in schools

The research study aims at producing a model which attributes this phenomenon to both *social and administrative acceptance* which are substantially stimulating corporal punishment practiced by teachers in schools.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

The percent of CP of children as reported by their parents is 96% for public/experimental schools and 58% for private/language schools. The difference between answers obtained by the two school categories is highly significant (P-value<0.01) which means that parents from public schools reported using CP more than those from private schools. The percent of teachers stating that they apply CP in school is 96% for public/experimental schools and 54% for private/language schools. The difference between answers obtained by the two school categories is significant (P-value<0.01) which means that teachers in public schools use CP more than those in private schools. Students who confirmed practicing CP in their schools represent 97% for public/experimental schools only (Figure 1). The data analysis interpretation reflects how CP is widespread among schools as reported by parents, teachers and students and shows that CP is being much more used in public schools than private schools.

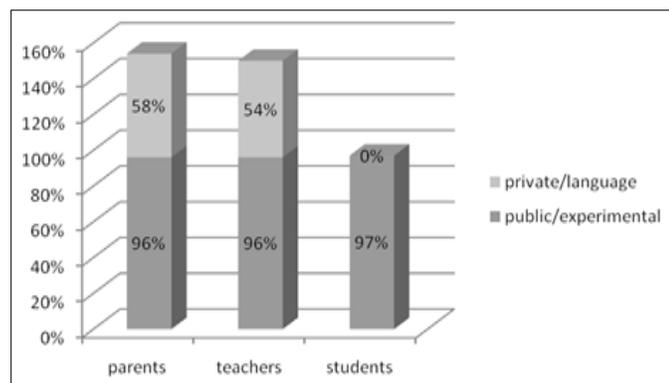


Fig 1: CP rate as confirmed by parents, teachers, and students

5. Administrative Acceptance and Corporal Punishment

Concerning communication between the school administration and parents, the data analysis reflects the poor standard of communication. A large number of parents – 76% in public schools and 82% in private schools reported that the school had never summoned them to discuss their child’s performance or misbehavior. Parents from private schools also clarified that unless their children make trouble in class, teachers do not have to contact parents frequently. This may also explain the insignificant difference (P-value = 0.15) in answers obtained by teachers in public and private schools on how many times they contacted parents during the past

academic year (figure 2). However, the communication rate can be judged better through regular meetings held by the school (figure 3). For 62% of parents from public schools versus 30% of parents from private schools confirmed they were never contacted to attend a meeting by the school (p-value = 0.01). Further, parents from public schools added personally that those meetings are made to discuss school renovation to collect donations from parents and in turn, most parents ignore the school’s invitation for a parents’ meeting.

Regarding how the school administration deals with parents’ complaints about corporal punishment applied to their children, 50% of parents in public/experimental and 33% in private/language schools reported that the school never penalizes teachers in response to their complaints. Plus, 45% of parents in public/experimental and 17% in private/language schools replied “very often” to the question of whether the school would favor the teacher, with an approaching significant difference (P-value) of 0.09 (figures 4 & 5). This rate denotes an obvious failure from the school administration to enforce policy concerning corporal punishment. This lack in penalizing teachers could be one of the reasons why some parents refrain from reporting. Moreover, 71% of the students reported that the school principal or vice principal applied corporal punishment themselves on other students which may account for their failure to apply legal sanctions on teachers for the same practices (figure 6).

Concerning the role of the social worker, it was rated by 86% of teachers as the second effective means of discipline after informing parents (Figure 7 and 8). This could be hypothetical because it was contradicted by the students’ answers to the question if teachers send other students to the social worker. This is due to the high significant difference (p<0.01) between students’ answers of almost daily, often, and sometimes, rarely, never (figure 9). Students clarified personally that teachers usually send students to social worker to receive even more physical punishment not to solve their problems or talk to them. Thus, the social workers also apply even harder CP on students. Plus, data indicates moderate initiation from parents to resort to the social worker in reaction to CP with an insignificant difference (P-value = 0.13) between the two school types (figure 10). Regarding teachers’ past experiences with CP, data shows that most teachers were exposed to CP in schools when they were children with no significant different (P-value = 0.17) between public and private schools (figure 11).

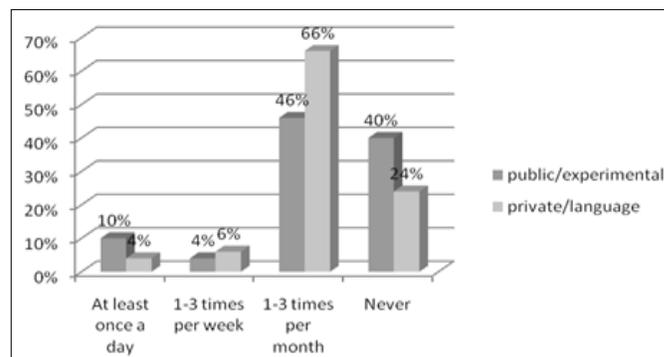


Fig 2: teachers’ answers to the question of how many times they called for the students’ parents within the past academic year

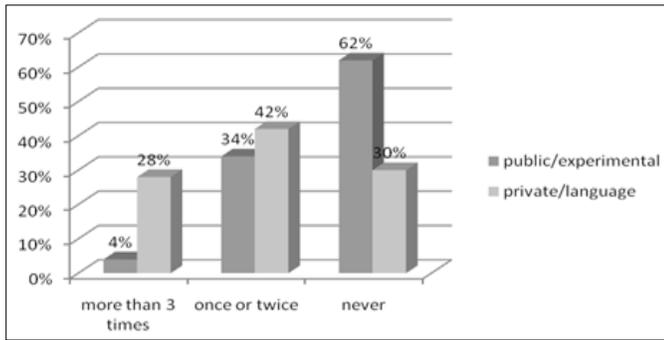


Fig 3: parents' answers to the question of how many times they were invited by the school to attend parents' meeting during the past academic year.

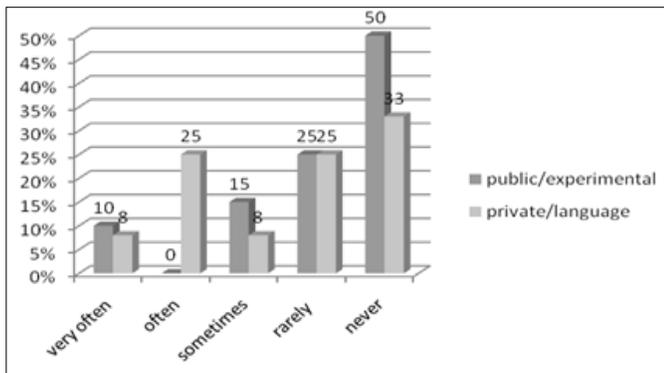


Fig 4: parents' answers to the question if the school applies sanction on teachers who corporally punish their children

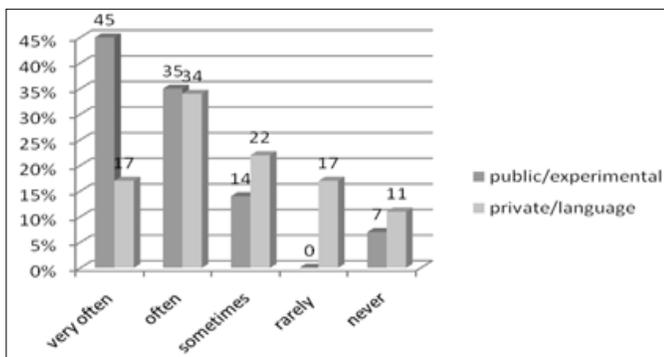


Fig 5: parents' answers to the question if the school favors teachers who corporally punish their children

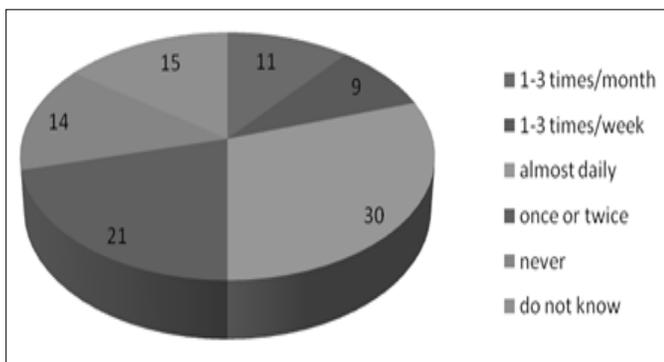


Fig 6: students' answers regarding how frequent the school principal or vice principal apply CP on students

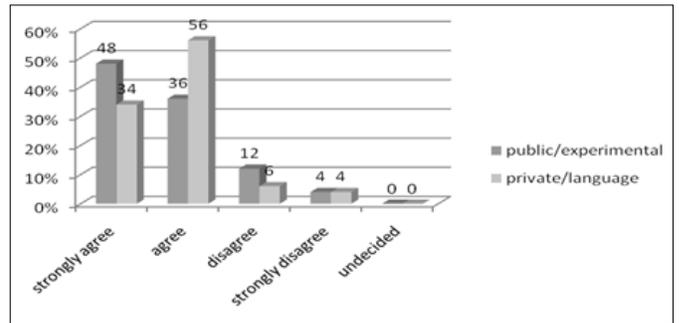


Fig 7: teachers' answers to the question if they think of informing parents as an effective means of discipline

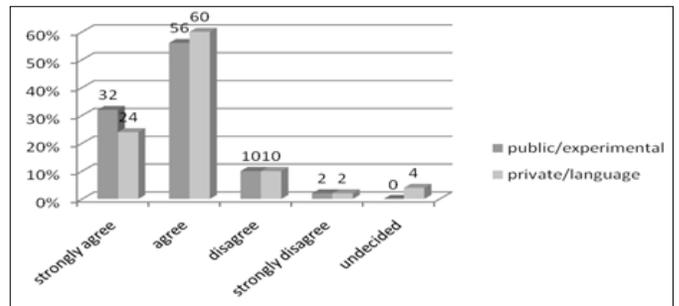


Fig 8: teachers' answers to the question if they think of sending the students to the social worker as an effective means of discipline

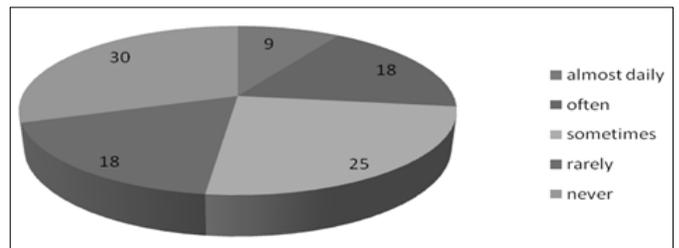


Fig 9: students' answers to the question of how frequent teachers send students to the social worker in their school

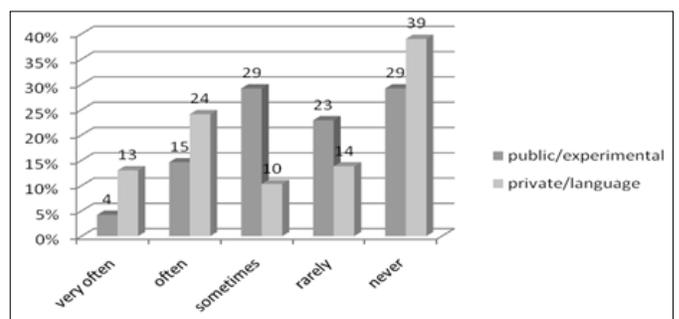


Fig 10: parents' answers to the question if they would talk to the social worker when their children are beaten at school

5.1 Social Acceptance and Corporal Punishment

The data analysis regarding parents' use of CP in home accounts for 72% for public/experimental and 42% for private/language as shown in figure 12 with high significant difference (P-value = 0.002) between parents whose children in public/experimental school and parents whose children are in private/language school. This difference conforms to what some teachers from public schools stated that children who

were physically punished at home, would not behave well in schools unless they are beaten.

It is noted that 84% of parents from public/experimental school and 68% for parents from private/language school were exposed to CP when they were children at home with low significant difference of P-value=0.10 (figure 13). Regarding parents' general attitude towards the use of CP in school, it is clear that parents whose children are in public/experimental school disapproves of CP in school less than parents whose children are in private/language school although p-value=0.17 which is not significant (figure 14). It can be implied also that teachers working in public/experimental schools showed higher approval rate of using CP than teachers working in private/experimental schools (figure 15).

Considering how parents and students were informed that CP is legally forbidden, data analysis shows that the primary channel of informing parents and students is TV or newspapers (70% and 55% respectively) whereas the percentage of parents and students who learned about current policy through information provided by the school is 8% & 1% respectively (figure 16). In other words, the school administration is hardly involved in informing parents and students about education policies and takes a passive position in raising awareness of it.

The question whether or not parents actively report CP incidents applied to their children reflects no significant different (p-value=0.93) between parents from public and private schools because 59% of parents (private) versus 60% of parents (public) reported that they never submitted a complaint to the school administration (figure 17). Nevertheless, we cannot blame parents for being passive in reporting because their attitude could be highly influenced by the school's passive reaction to other parents' complaints.

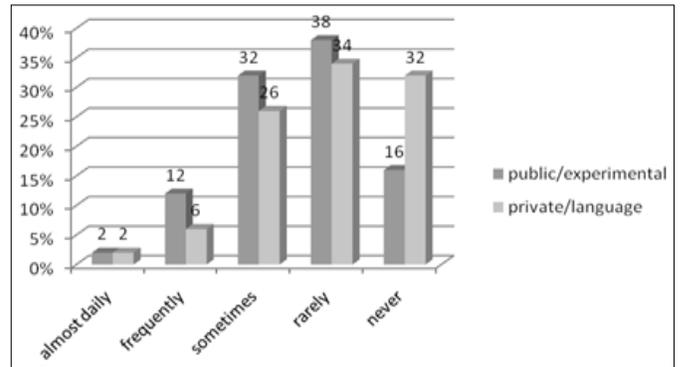


Fig 13: Parents' answers to the question of how frequent they were beaten at home when they were children

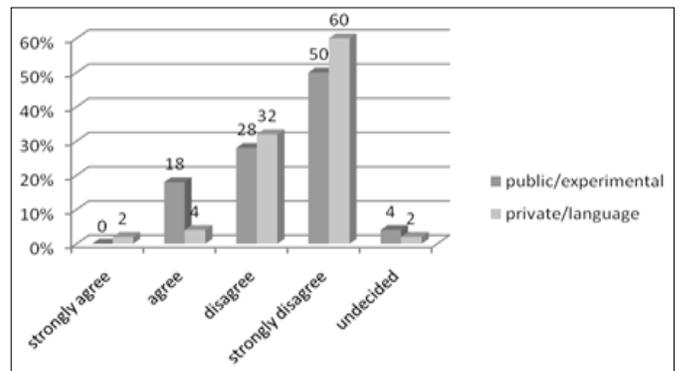


Fig 14: Parents' answers to the question if they agree to use CP in school

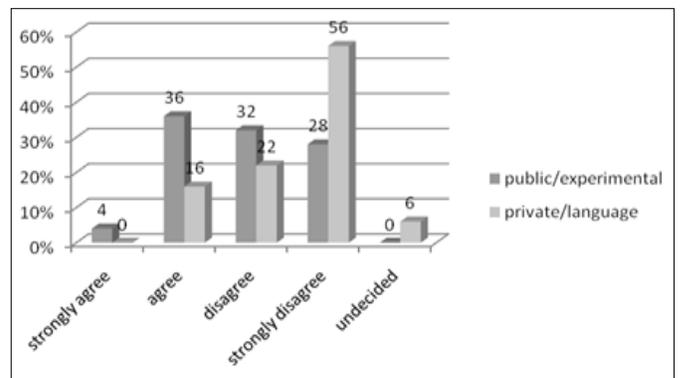


Fig 15: Teachers' answers to the question if they agree to use CP in schools

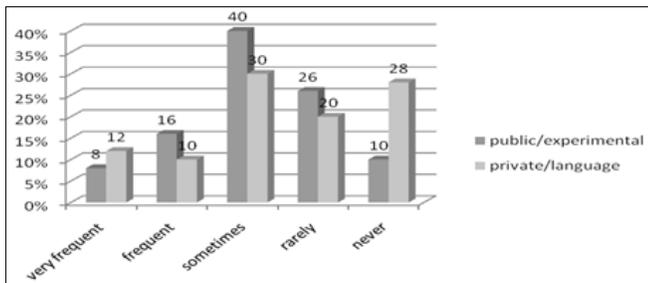


Fig 11: teachers' answer to the question of how frequent they were beaten at school when they were children

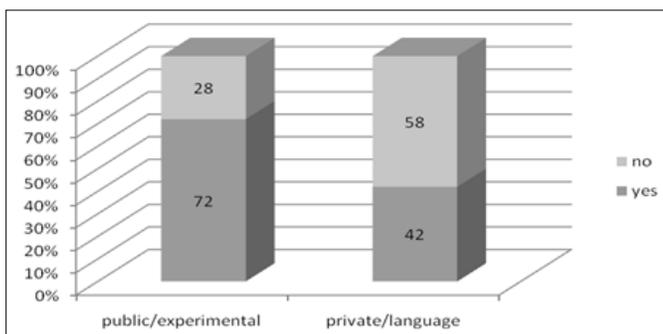


Fig 12: Rate of parents applying CP at home on their children

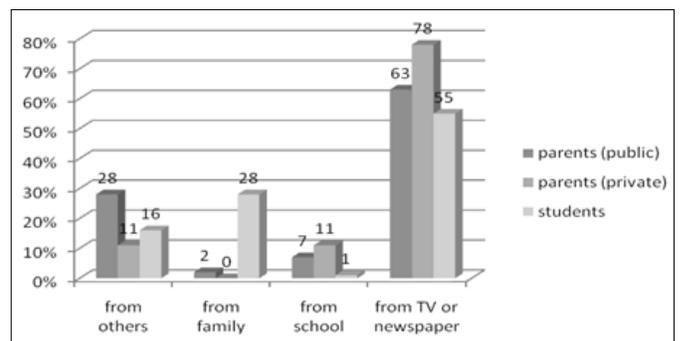


Fig 16: parents and students' answers to how they were informed that CP is forbidden

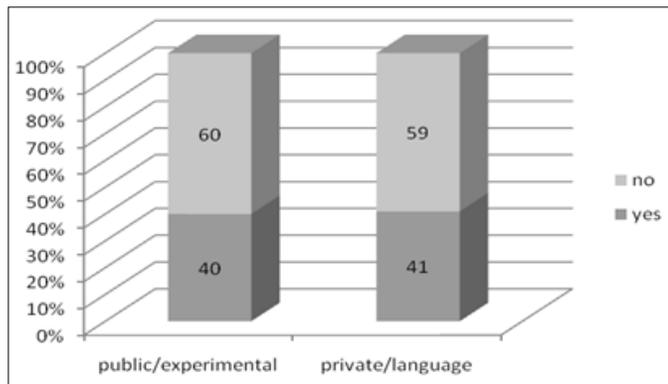


Fig 17: parents’ answers if they ever reported CP incidents applied to their children

Table 1: the Pearson correlation Coefficient and the Spearman correlation coefficient

Coefficient	Value	P-value
Pearson	0.429	0.00
Spearman	0.423	0.00

6. Recommendations

To eradicate CP, policy enforcement should be the responsibility of various entities. Traditionally, the Ministry of Education represents the policy makers in terms of education legislation and policy formulation; however, empirical experience shows a critical need for other organizations concerned with child rights to work in accordance with the ministry's policy.

At the school level, the role of social workers needs to be more effective by acting as a facilitator between students and teachers in order to supervise the relation between them, sustain policy enforcement, report policy violation cases, and investigate students' learning and behavior problems so as to solve them. Activating the social worker's role this way would take from the teacher the burden of correcting students' deviant or violent behavior. With regard to the teacher, the process of qualifying teachers and continuing their development should start at early stages. Teachers should be acquainted with alternatives to non-violent disciplinary techniques and behavior-management techniques early throughout their university degree where they first learn the basics of teaching. Later, upon actual recruitment, they ought to receive regular training by the ministry or specialized NGOs as part of a piloted program. There should be a well-developed deterrent policy for teachers who still apply corporal punishment despite training on other means for discipline.

To overcome family-based factors, more effort should be exerted to raise parents’ awareness of the CP psychological and physical damages associated with parental physical punishment to their children at home. Parents need to be encouraged to report their children’s exposure to CP at school as well. Considering family-based factors, as we indicated in our model, family acceptance of their children being corporally punished in school, beating them at home, or refraining from reporting is part of the reason why it is widely practiced by teachers. We cannot eliminate corporal punishment from schools while parents still use it at home

because parents' approval of corporal punishment would destroy the school's new techniques for discipline. Hence, we need to change the social attitude towards it through intensive efforts to raise awareness of child rights to protection, current policy implications, the negative consequences for using corporal punishment as a tool for discipline, and the right course of action to be taken to report corporal punishment incidents.

In addition to increasing public awareness, there must be a way to restore the trust between parents and school administration. As data shows, a large percentage of parents believed that the school administration would defend teachers most of the time and doubt that any legal action will be taken if they report CP cases. This notion should be changed through the school's justice in applying legal sanctions on teachers in response for parents' complaints and be transparent about taking the right course of action against teachers.

7. Conclusion

This research is not meant to victimize students nor criminalize teachers, but it aims at demonstrating objectively the other side of the fact through highlighting the causes and consequences of corporal punishment practiced against students from a policy-based perspective. The research findings proved a positive correlation between administrative acceptance and the use of corporal punishment in schools in the sense that school administrators themselves perpetrates it. Moreover, they deal passively with parents' complaints, do not communication with parents, hardly apply sanction on teachers violating law, and have failed to activate the role the social worker. The research findings also proved a direct correlation between social acceptance and the use of corporal punishment in schools in terms of beating children in home, poor follow up with the school, approval of CP in school, and refrain from reporting actively their children exposure to it.

It can be concluded also from the research findings that CP is not seen by most parents or teachers as an effective means of discipline, although a minority see it as somewhat useful. Thus, there should be sufficient support for non-violent means of discipline if they are properly selected and implemented. This result denies the traditional assumption that it helps students to study and behaves well, and maintains the teachers' respect in class. Conversely, the findings support a conclusion that violence triggers more violence among students, creates a grudge against teachers and the school administration.

In response to the study findings that conforms to our hypothesis, recommendations were formulated to deal with school-based factors and family-based reasons for SCP. Regarding the school, it has been recommended that policies must be enforced by applying sanctions on practitioners; that the social worker should be more involved in reforming students’ behavior; and that teachers need more training on proper disciplinary techniques. Concerning parents, it has been suggested that civil society organizations could help in raising parents' awareness of the necessity to remove CP from school and home, specifying the right course of action to report it, and clarifying the damages of CP on children. Plus, parents' attention should be drawn to the right course of action to be taken against teachers using CP. Finally, no single entity can enforce a policy that bans CP, rather all civil society

organizations, large businesses, and the Ministry of Education should collaborate to combat this phenomenon. Action is needed both inside the school by reforming the school administration and building up capacities, and outside the school by changing social attitude towards the use of corporal punishment on children.

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