

Child Development Minister Urges to Curb School Corporal Punishment in India

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Editorial

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Editorial

Once again, inflicting punishment in schools towards students is one of the burning issues in India. Recently, Maneka Gandhi, a Union Women and Child Development minister of India wrote a letter to Human Resource Development minister that there is urgent need to curb corporal punishment in schools. This happened in wake of the media report on use of punishment in schools towards a group of students. On 15 February 2017 media (Times of India) reports about a principal of a government school in eastern Uttar Pradesh forced a group of girl students to run on the playground without their skirts for failing to memorise Sanskrit shlokas. Although, use of corporal punishment in schools is ban in India, repeated incidents of punishment towards students is an everyday affair in schools.

Corporal punishment is commonly defined as giving physical pain to a person or use to administer physical force towards a person. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), General Comment No. 8 defines corporal or physical punishment as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort. It includes hitting (‘smacking’, ‘slapping’, ‘spanking’) children, with the hand or with an implement Moreover, there are other non-physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child.”

The use of corporal punishment and non-physical punishment are very common practices in homes and schools to improve the character of an individual and inculcate the moral values by the adults on minors. A study on Child Abuse in India-2007 commissioned by the

Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, reports “every two out of three school children reported facing corporal punishment”. The role of punishment has also been significantly identified in educating the child. This can be seen in widely accepted proverb ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’. The notion that children will only flourish if chastised, physically or otherwise, for any wrongdoing. Thus, use of such punishments is part of the culture or imbedded in the society as means of discipline the child or minor globally and particularly in India.

Yet, research findings on relationship between use of punishment and its effect on children have found very disturbing results. Physical punishment leads to aggression, maladjustment, anxiety, withdrawal, alienation, delinquency/antisocial behaviour, school avoidance and dropout. Not only this, it makes the victim abandoned, sad, lonely and lowers self-esteem. Gershoff, one of the pioneers in this area, examined that individuals who have experienced physical punishment in childhood, they are more likely to punish their own spouse and child. Recently, Straus and his colleagues have found the association between physical punishment and sociopathy and psychopathology as outcomes. They found major outcomes linking with physical punishment such as that increased impulsiveness and less self-control, greater approval for other forms of violence, indulgence into risky or aggressive sexual behaviours, poorer national average mental ability, depression and many other harmful effects. This growing body of research strongly recommends stopping the physical punishment in all situations.

Despite adopting several measures to curb the use of corporal punishment in schools, principals and teachers still believe that use of harsh punishment or strict discipline is necessary for making students a good citizen

is one of the findings of my research. Even, some students accepted that use of punishment is given to them for their own betterment. However, most of students revealed their anger, fear and disinterest in attending school or belongingness to school.

Another possible reason behind use of corporal punishment in schools is the ignorance of children's voices in policy discourses as well as in research studies. There is no such platform for children where they can share their experiences or show their agony towards such cruel form of practices. There is also dearth of research studies in psychology and education regarding involving children's experiences or hearing their voices on such issues in India.

Ineffective teacher training programmes could be another reason behind prevalence of punishments in schools. As Prof. Krishna Kumar criticizes the existing forms of teacher training programs and urges for more rigorous and professional training programs for young teachers in India. These training programs should have the components of respect for the individuals and safeguard their rights. Such training programs must have an outlook of 'positive psychology' focusing on individual's strengths and virtues rather than their weaknesses.

In conclusion, whatever the reason may be, the situation in the country is alarming to curb the use of any form of punishment in schools. It is very explicit that physical punishment leads to harmful effects, mental health problems and violates the individual rights. Policies and programmes need to focus on strategies to reduce the incidents of physical punishment and to enhance the positive aspects of life.

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