To Punish, or Not to Punish

-- A Study on School Corporal Punishment
Abstract

Corporal punishment was once widely used in schools although it has been banned with the enactment of Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy. There is still fierce debate on whether or not teachers should render corporal punishment in school. However, do students and teachers have enough knowledge about corporal punishment? Moreover, what are their viewpoints of corporal punishment? This study was aimed to know the viewpoints of students, teachers, and even drillmasters, we anticipated to know the advantages, disadvantages, purpose, and effects of corporal punishment. To make the study more precise, we used both questionnaires and interviews to gather the information. We analyzed and compared the findings between the questionnaire and the interview, finding the results. In our research findings, the main purpose of corporal punishment is to deter and to alter the wrong behaviors of students. The advantage of corporal punishment agreed by both students and the teacher is that it can immediately change the bad behavior of students. On the other hand, the disadvantage of corporal punishment is causing pain and harm. We also learned that corporal punishment was only one of the ways that taught students right things. There were many other methods to replace corporal punishment, but they might take teachers more time to practice. However, they would prevent students from being harmed. We hoped teachers could draw on the results and would have better ideas on how to teach students correct behaviors without using corporal punishment which was harmful to students. We also hoped this study would help students to protect themselves from harm and understand the bad effects of corporal punishment so that they may correct their bad behaviors when they are told, not until they are punished.

Key word: Corporal Punishment, Zero Corporal Punishment, Hitting, Scolding, Slapping
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I  INTRODUCTION

I.1  Research Background

The origin of corporal punishment could date back to hundreds of years ago around the world. It was widely used in schools, in homes, and even in judicial or quasi-judicial circumstances. As for school corporal punishment, it is believed that this kind of punishment could immediately deter students’ wrong behaviors and help them learn better. As an old saying goes, “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” Corporal punishment was viewed as an efficient way to teach student correct behaviors and to make them study harder.

In recent decades, corporal punishment have been banned in many countries in since corporal punishment are considered harmful to students and will cause plenty of adverse effects, such as harm and unwillingness to learn. In Taiwan, we often learn from the news that a student gets punished and, as the result, is badly injured. Therefore, bills are enacted and a policy called Zero Corporal Punishment in School is conducted so as to protect students from physical or mental harm.

Although bills against corporal punishment have been enacted, people in Taiwan are still debating on whether it is right and necessary for teachers to use corporal punishment in school. Therefore, we selected this issue as our research topic.

I.2  Research Purpose

The purpose of the study is to get more knowledge about corporal punishment in school. We wanted to know the advantages, disadvantages, and purposes of corporal punishment in school. We also wanted to know what kind of punishment is called corporal punishment and when the proper time is to use corporal punishment in school. Moreover, we wanted to know the effects brought by Zero Corporal Punishment. Therefore, we conducted this research to know the viewpoint of students, teachers, and experts on corporal punishment in school. After having collected enough information, we analyzed the information in the hope of finding the result we needed -- the advantage and disadvantage of corporal punishment, and the viewpoints from students, teachers and drillmasters.

I.3  Research Value

The results of this study may show us most students’ and teachers’ ideas about
corporal punishment, which teachers can take as a reference to decide whether they should use corporal punishment, and students may have more understanding about the meaning and purpose of corporal punishment and how to protect themselves. As students, corporal punishment is familiar to us, while we have little knowledge about it. Therefore, we do need to know more about corporal punishment so that we can understand whether we suffer unreasonable punishment or not. Besides, we hope teachers can take our research findings for reference and think twice before they render corporal punishment on their students.

I.4 Definition of Terms

To facilitate readers’ understanding, we want to define two terms:

**Corporal punishment**: Corporal punishment is punishment that involves hitting someone, such as spanking, hitting with a rod, and drive someone to do something harmful to himself, such as forcing students to spank themselves.

**Zero Corporal Punishment**: It means that corporal punishment in school is forbidden, according to laws in Taiwan.

I.5 Research Questions

When we finish the research, we would like to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the purpose of corporal punishment in school?
2. What kind of punishment is called corporal punishment?
3. When should corporal punishment be rendered in school?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment in school?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of zero corporal punishment in School Policy?

I.6 Literature Review

We found some articles about Zero Corporal Punishment Policy and some advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment. An article about corporal punishment on CommonWealth Magazine (2007) pointed out that several research on corporal punishment have been done and indicates the disadvantage of corporal punishment. If a child is taught by using corporal punishment, he tends to be
violent. While another article (Beliarken, 2011) pointed out that Taiwan does not have proper measures to replace corporal punishment. Therefore, if students are not punished when doing wrong, they will naturally take it lightly and, as the result, do something worse.

II METHOD

II.1 Research Design

The study was designed to know the viewpoints of students and teachers upon corporal punishment and Zero Corporal Punishment Policy. By conducting this research, we anticipate to find a deeper glimpse about corporal punishment and put the result to good use.

The research consists of two parts; one is the questionnaire and the other is the interview. In the first part, we used questionnaires to know the viewpoints of students upon corporal punishment. The viewpoints included what corporal punishment meant to them, and what the advantages and disadvantages would be brought about when using or not using corporal punishment.

In the interview, we would like to have deeper knowledge about corporal punishment. Therefore, we interviewed the drillmasters and teachers in school who knew corporal punishment very much. In addition, we interviewed the students who had ever received corporal punishment in school, and the students who did not experience corporal punishment.

II.1.1 The Participants

In the part of survey, the participants were approximately 200 students randomly chosen from the first graders to the third graders in one commercial high school in Chia-yi City. The students who were chosen might have received or not received corporal punishment. The respondents of either side were suitable.

In the other part, we had interviews with teachers and drillmasters in school. We had interviews with the teacher who had ever conducted corporal punishment and the one who had not. The reason we chose drillmasters was because they were in charge of the safety of students in school and had more experiences about
II.1.2 Materials

The questionnaire consisted of 9 questions. Question 1 and 2 were aimed to know the basic information about the respondents. These question included gender and whether the respondents have ever received corporal punishment. Question 3 to 9 was designed to know the viewpoints of the respondents. Aspects of the questions were aimed to know the influence of corporal punishment on the respondents. These included the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment, the situation that corporal punishment should be used, and the effect brought by Zero Corporal Punishment.

The interview was designed to know the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment from the viewpoints and knowledge of teachers and drillmasters in school. Therefore, we focused on the viewpoints of these important parts. The instrument used was a recorder. Afterwards, we transcribed and analysed these records as our research data.

II.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures took place between October 1, 2011 and December 30, 2011.

In the first part, we distributed the questionnaire to students who were randomly chosen from the first to the third grades. There were 200 questionnaires in total. After the respondents filled out the questionnaire, we retrieved them and made analyses using Excel.

In the second part, we interviewed a teacher and two drillmasters in school. In the interview, we used a recording device and used the records to draw on the viewpoints of participants.

II.3 Data Analysis

We used Excel to gather statistics from the questionnaires. We calculated the members and the percentage of the data we retrieved. Afterwards, we drew the viewpoints from these data. In the part of interview, we listened to the interview records, summarizing the viewpoints of interviewees, and using these findings to conclude our research. We hoped we could get more precise data through both the
III FINDINGS

In this section, research findings include two parts. One is the analysis of the results of the questionnaire; the other part is the results of the interview. Both of the results are shown and discussed as follows.

III.1 The Questionnaire

Table 1 Basic Information about the Participants (N=200)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Male (66, 33%)  □ Female (134, 67%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you ever received corporal punishment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes (108, 54%)  □ No (92,46%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 1 and 2 were aimed to gather the basic background information about the respondents, which was helpful to the research. In question 2, the proportion of those who have ever received Corporal punishment to those who haven’t was about 1:1.

Table 2 Concept about Corporal Punishment (N=200)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. As far as you are concerned, what is corporal punishment? (Multiple answers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Slapping (138, 69%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Hitting with a rod (on hands or hip) (164, 82%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Scolding (46, 23%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Command you to stand by the wall, blackboard, etc (78, 39%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Others________ (32, 16%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In question 3, 138 students considered slapping to be corporal punishment. 164 students considered hitting with a rod (on hands or bottom) corporal punishment. On the contrary, Scolding and commanding someone to stand by the wall, blackboard were not regarded as a way of rendering corporal punishment.
Table 3 *Reasons for Corporal Punishment (N=200)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. What do you think is the good reason to use corporal punishment? (Multiple answers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Deterring bad behaviors (172, 89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Being helpful to school work (34, 17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Others________ (18,9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In question 4, deterring bad behaviors was agreed by most respondents as a proper use of corporal punishment. However, only a few students (17%) agreed that using corporal punishment was a helpful and proper way to foster school work and other purpose.

Table 4 *Advantages & Disadvantages of Corporal Punishment (N=200)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment? (Multiple answers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantage:</strong> □ Helpful to your test (34, 17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Deter students’ bad behaviors (156, 78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disadvantage:</strong> □ Making students unwilling to study (122, 61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Causing pain and harm (184, 92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Others________ (18,9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents thought the advantage of corporal punishment was deterring bad behaviors, accounting for 78 percent, 156 students. As for the disadvantages of corporal punishment, making students unwilling to study and causing pain and harm would definitely bring about negative effects.

Table 5 *Is Corporal Punishment Helpful*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Do you think corporal punishment is helpful to your motivation for tests?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes (64, 32%) □ No (136, 68%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32% of the teachers in schools thought corporal punishment was helpful to students’ study, while most of them did not think it helpful to their tests, with 68 percent of the respondents disproving.

Table 6 *Situation for Corporal Punishment (N=200)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. What situation do you consider proper to use corporal punishment? (Multiple answers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
When students do something wrong (110, 55%)
When students do not have good scores in tests (10, 5%)
Corporal punishment should not be used (80, 40%)
Others ________ (10, 5%)

55 percent of the respondents agreed that corporal punishment could be used when students did something wrong. On the other hand, only a few respondents (5%) agreed that corporal punishment should be rendered when students performed poorly on their tests.

The percentage that corporal punishment should not be used was 40 percent, which was relatively high, only second to the first option.

Table 7 Agree or Disagree with Corporal Punishment (N=200)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes, as long as it is reasonable. (100, 50%)</th>
<th>No, corporal punishment should never be used (100, 50%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In this question, corporal punishment in school was acceptable to 50 percent of students; coincidently, 50 percent of students thought that corporal punishment in school should not be used.

Table 8 Zero Corporal Punishment – 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. As for you, what are the advantages and the disadvantages of Zero Corporal Punishment? (Multiple answers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantage:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Helpful to school work (18, 9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Students can learn happily because they would not be punished for bad scores in tests (162, 81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ It becomes more difficult for teachers to teach students. (70, 35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Students may not change their bad behavior if they do not get punished. (140, 70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Others (10, 5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70 percent of participants agreed that the advantage of Zero Corporal Punishment in School was that students could learn happily because they would not be punished for bad scores in tests, while 70 percent of participants worried that
students doing something wrong may not change their bad behaviors if they did not receive corporal punishment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10. Do you support Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes (108, 54%)      □ No (92, 46%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 8 and Question 10 were opposite questions; therefore, the percentage of the two questions should be the same in theory. Similar to question 8, the respondents who agreed with Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy and those who didn’t were nearly the same, which made the data more accurate.

### III.2 The Interview

We interviewed a teacher and two drillmasters in school. The questions we interviewed with were “What is the purpose of corporal punishment in school?”, “What kind of punishment is called corporal punishment?”, “What are the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment in school?” and “What is your opinion about Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy?” The process of the interview was recorded; afterwards, we listened to the recorded voice files again and again, transcribed and summarized the informants’ views, and concluded them as follows:

**Definition of Corporal Punishment**

The teacher interviewed thought that corporal punishment was the punishment that was related to physical punishment, such as slapping. One of the drillmasters agreed with this viewpoint. However, the other drillmaster did not agree. In his point of views, behaviors that would cause harm mentally or physically were considered corporal punishment. For example, slapping as well as scolding was corporal punishment.

**Purpose of Corporal Punishment in School**

All informants agreed the purpose of corporal punishment was to change students’ wrong behavior. Nevertheless, the teacher said it was definitely improper to render corporal punishment when students performed poorly in their tests.

**Situation Proper to Render Corporal Punishment in School**

The teacher said that whether it is proper to render corporal punishment depended on the age of students, and the standard of rendering corporal punishment
varies from one student to another. Similarly, the drillmaster thought whether one should be rendered corporal punishment varies from one another. What was more important was whether the way could change the bad behaviors of the student, said the drillmaster. Besides the viewpoint above, both the teacher and the drillmaster agreed that corporal punishment should be used when students did something bad instead of poor performance on study.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Corporal Punishment in School

The advantage of corporal punishment was instantly altering wrong behaviors of students, which was agreed by both the teacher and the drillmasters. The disadvantage, on the other hand, was causing pain mentally or physically. Moreover, using corporal punishment may make students lose interest in their study.

Effects Brought about by Zero Corporal Punishment in School

The teacher said it might be harder to deter and change the behaviors of students doing something wrong. Likewise, the drillmaster thought it might be harder to change students' correct behaviors since corporal punishment was banned. However, the drillmaster said corporal punishment was just one of the ways to change the wrong behaviors. There were still many alternatives to correct students’ attitude and behaviors, while it might probably take teachers or drillmasters more time to reach the immediate effect that corporal punishment can do.

IV CONCLUSION

IV.1 Conclusion

After conducting the research, we indeed got more knowledge about the viewpoints of the students, the teacher, and the drillmasters. We learned more about the definition of corporal punishment, the purpose of corporal punishment, the situation proper to render corporal punishment, the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment, and effects brought about by Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy. In conclusion, we might have achieved the goal that we wanted to get more knowledge about corporal punishment. Based on our findings, we hoped the teachers rendering corporal punishment could think more over the negative effects brought by corporal punishment. On the other hand, students may know the pros and cons and the purpose of corporal punishment. They may know under
what circumstances they should protect themselves and what can help them change their bad deeds if they know the purposes, advantages, and disadvantages of corporal punishment.

IV.2 Review of Research Findings

In this part, we would discuss the data in the following headings, each of which focused on a specific aspect. In each heading, we would compare the information gathered in questionnaires and interviews, giving reasonable explanations.

Definition of Corporal Punishment

As it was called corporal punishment, which was related to physically punishment, most students agreed punishment such as hitting or slapping was corporal punishment. Scolding, which was mentally rather than physically, was not considered corporal punishment by most students and two of the interviewees. It might imply that if teachers could not use corporal punishment in school when students did something wrong, they could reprimand students, which was less harmful to the students compared to corporal punishment.

Purpose of Corporal Punishment

The majority of participants thought the purpose of corporal punishment was to deter and to change the wrong behaviors of the students. It was considered improper to render corporal punishment to those who did not perform well in their study and if the teachers should render corporal punishment to them, it would probably cause pain and, what’s worse, make the students lose their dignity and motivation of learning, and, as a result, become unwilling to study.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Corporal Punishment in School

Deterring and altering wrong behaviors instantly was the main advantage of corporal punishment, while the disadvantage was that it would definitely cause pain and harm. Corporal punishment was merely one of the ways of punishment. There were other ways to change students’ wrong deeds without causing pain, but they would take more time to reach the same effect. That was another main disadvantage. For teachers, it seemed necessary to protect students from being harmed and they might need to devote more time to and be more patient with their students. For students, it might be important to know the endeavors the teachers made to teach them right things.
Effects Brought about by Zero Corporal Punishment in School

Doubtlessly, this bill provided students with an environment free from any physically harm. However, as one disadvantage mentioned before, it would take teachers or drillmasters more time to teach students or to correct their bad behaviors. Therefore, the government should take some measures to help teachers, or it might seem quite difficult and impractical to reach the goal and purpose of Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy.

We hoped that this research would help teachers know the viewpoints of students on corporal punishment, to think more on corporal punishment, and could find a better solution that would not cause students pain or harm. We also hoped this research would help students know the purpose of corporal punishment and know the efforts teachers made to teach them right deeds and proper attitude, which are very important in life.
Reference


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Appendix

Questionnaire of Corporal Punishment

1. Gender: □ Male □ Female
2. Have you ever received corporal punishment? □ Yes □ No
3. As for you, what is corporal punishment?
   □ Slapping □ Hitting with a rod (on hands or bottom)
   □ Scolding □ Command you to stand by the wall, blackboard, etc
   □ Others________
4. What purpose do you think is the corporal punishment?
   □ Deterring bad behavior
   □ Being helpful to school work
   □ Others________
5. What are advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment?
   □ Helpful to your test
   □ Deter your bad behavior
   □ Making students unwilling to study
   □ Causing pain and harm
   □ Others________
6. Do you think corporal punishment is helpful to your motivation for tests?
   □ Yes □ No
7. What situation do you consider proper to use corporal punishment?
   □ When students do something wrong
   □ When students do not have good scores in test
   □ Corporal punishment should not be used
   □ Others ________
8. Do you agree with corporal punishment in school?
   □ Yes, as long as it is reasonable.
   □ No, corporal punishment should never be used
9. As for you, what are the advantages and the disadvantages of Zero Corporal Punishment?
   □ Helpful to school work
   □ Students could learn happily because they would not be punished for bad scores in tests
   □ It becomes more difficult for teachers to teaches students.
   □ Students may not change their bad behavior if they do not get punished.
☐ Others
10. Do you support Zero Corporal Punishment in School Policy?
   ☐ Yes    ☐ No