

CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON, AND EXPERIENCES OF, PHYSICAL AND VERBAL ABUSE IN SCHOOLS: TWO CASE STUDIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

In Zimbabwe, changes to regulations on corporal punishment have led to claims by teachers, parents and others that the only effective weapon that was there to maintain discipline in schools has been removed. This study aimed at finding out views and experiences of primary school children on the use of corporal punishment and verbal assault as means of maintaining discipline in schools. It set out from the view that physical punishment and verbal assault by school authorities are forms of child abuse and a violation of children's rights. A case study approach was used in two primary schools, one from a low-income location (high-density residential area) and another from a high-income location (low-density residential area), both in Harare. The study established that in spite of the existence of legal instruments, children are physically and verbally abused in various ways. While children are aware of their rights, they, however, find it difficult to report and in some cases do not even know where and to whom to report to. The study makes a number of recommendations directed towards authorities both in and outside the school system responsible for the discipline of children.

Keywords: child abuse; corporal punishment; children's rights; discipline; verbal assaults; emotional abuse

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) regards corporal punishment and verbal assault as violations of the child's rights and therefore forms of child abuse. This view is shared by the Child Family Community Australia (2012) and the Australian Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (2013). Physical abuse or corporal punishment involves any of the following, among others: hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, biting, poisoning; while emotional or psychological abuse/maltreatment involves rejection, hostility, teasing/bullying, yelling, criticism and exposure to domestic violence. Research has also shown that, whatever the intentions of the perpetrator, both corporal and emotional punishments negatively impact on the child (Gershoff 2002; Linke 2002; Smith, Gollop, Taylor and Marshall 2004) and even affect them later in their adult lives (Draper, Jon, Pirkis, Snowden, Lautenschlager, Wilson and Almeida 2008).

This article reports on a study that focused on the views and experiences of primary school children in Zimbabwe on issues of corporal punishment and verbal assault. Following this introduction, it briefly discusses theories related to this topic and then reviews literature regarding corporal punishment and verbal assault in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. The rest of the article focuses on the study itself, that is, the methodology, findings and discussion of findings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Various theories have been put forward to explain the continued use of corporal punishment in a number of countries, in spite of the above UN convention. With regards to post-colonial states, one view sees corporal punishment as a remnant of authoritarian colonial practices, previously used as means of social and political control to instill fear, obedience and subordination in society (Harber and Mncube 2012; Harber and Sakade 2009; Tafa 2002). This is, however, also regarded as only a legitimisation of violence by the strong against the weak in post-colonial states. In the school situation, teachers and other staff are in stronger positions of authority in comparison to students. They are therefore more likely to inflict corporal punishment on students in the name of discipline, using their positions of authority. A second explanation sees corporal punishment as a reflection of masculine dominance, a situation where males, often in authority, inflict both physical and emotional abuse on students, especially female students (South African Council of Educators (SACE) 2011; Caffyn 2006). This is supported by research in sub-Saharan Africa, which has revealed that 'female teachers often call on male teachers to carry out corporal punishment while they themselves resort to emotional abuse and insulting language to control learners' (PLAN 2008, cited in Mncube and Harber 2013: 16). A third explanation views the use of corporal punishment in schools as a sign of weakness on the part of teachers, both male and female, who are not confident with child-

centred teaching strategies. These teachers resort to teacher-centred approaches that involve controlling students by means of physical and verbal assault (Harber 2013). The fourth and last view considered here says that generally, it is the unequal power relations in society at large that are the basis for the practice of corporal and verbal abuse in schools. It is often that when some social groups see themselves as socially, politically and economically more powerful than others, the tendency is for these power differentials to be expressed physically in the form of corporal punishment and psychologically/emotionally as verbal assault (Morrell 2010). Schools are microcosms of the larger society in which they are located, meaning that what happens in schools is often a reflection or mirror of events in the broader society. Like the broader society, schools are authoritarian institutions; they expect automatic obedience from learners with little concern for social justice on the part of learners (SACE 2011; Mncube and Harber 2013). Learners' rights, feelings and needs are ignored. Unless the authoritarian hegemony in the broader society is addressed, it is difficult to eliminate corporal punishment and verbal assault in schools. These views will be considered in explaining the findings of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The UN Convention on Children's Rights has 54 Articles, four of which are most relevant to this study as they make reference to education and the discipline of children in the education system. These are Articles 28, 29, 37 and 42 (UNICEF 2005).

Zimbabwe ratified the above convention on the protection of the child and, like other governments, is expected to honour the rights of children (UNICEF 2010). When governments ratify human rights principles, it becomes mandatory for them to see to it that every citizen is treated equally and justly. These are fundamental human rights. For children, equality and justice also include how they are treated in schools, at home and in public. Save the Children UK (SCF-UK) (2000) notes that children in Zimbabwe, like in other countries, are protected by the UN articles of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child. 'All children ... have the right to be protected from harm. Preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse is essential to ensuring children's right to survival, development and well-being' (UNICEF 2010: 13).

While corporal punishment in schools has been banned in some countries, it is, however, still illegally being practised in a number of African countries. For instance, in the southern African region, it is practised in schools in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Harber and Mncube 2012; Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005). In Botswana, where corporal punishment is still legal, teachers use it as a strategy to control large and mixed classes. As would be expected, this has led to increased anxiety, fear and resentment among students (Humphreys

2006; Tafa 2002). Outside the southern African region, physical/corporal punishment is still applied in schools in Uganda, Egypt, Ghana and Tanzania (World Corporal Punishment Research). This is in spite of warnings from the World Health Organisation (WHO 2002) that the physical abuse of children results in both short- and long-term psychiatric and psychological damages in adulthood.

In Zimbabwe, changes in regulations on corporal punishment (Education Act 1997) led to claims by teachers that the only effective weapon they had to maintain discipline in classrooms and schools has been removed. Thus teachers, parents and other stakeholders think that disciplinary problems in schools and classrooms are manifestations of limitations on the use of corporal punishment as a means of maintaining discipline (UNICEF 2010). This is not a problem peculiar to Zimbabwe, as the following title to an article in the Australian press shows: 'Samoa divided over ban on corporal punishment in schools' (ABC 2013).

Over the years and in a number of countries, much of the debate on human and children's rights has tended to focus on the adult perspective on these issues. Writing about the situation of children in Honduras, Nyberg (1999) observed that children did not trust anyone anymore. They were always silent because of fear. On the Zimbabwean situation, Alston (1994: 200) observed that in many families, 'There is a cultural assumption that children should be seen but not heard'. Children in Zimbabwe complained that adults think that children do not know their rights; adults do not listen to, respect or value what children say; they do not take them seriously. They use both corporal and verbal assault as a means of disciplining children. This is child abuse, defined as 'a legal term applied to children and adolescents who are taken advantage of by adults (sometimes by another child) by virtue of his/her superior power and for his/her benefit or gratification' (Search 1985: 5).

When a parent or any other adult verbally assaults a child or withdraws affection, the child is affected emotionally (Osie-Hwedie and Hobona 2001). When adults unwarrantedly punish children's normal social behaviours such as talking, laughing and seeking attention, that may lead to the child's developmental retardation, depression, anxiety and withdrawal. Leach and Machakanja (2001) point out that schools are not always the havens that most people think they are, but institutions where children suffer both emotional and physical abuse. Among other embarrassing situations, teachers in high schools, for instance, sometimes use practical jokes, teasing and public degradation. The above-mentioned researchers also note that in Zimbabwe, in spite of the directive from the Ministry of Education against its use, corporal punishment is rampant in schools. Teachers use items such as thick sticks, old car fan belts and blackboard erasers to beat children. They are beaten on palms, knuckles, finger tips, the back, legs, buttocks and the back of the neck, slapped on the face and sometimes have their ears and hair pulled. In some cases, this forces children to keep their hair short, not because this makes them look smart, but as a strategy against teachers who pull their hair. Some parents, teachers and even other

children support the use of corporal punishment in schools. This is because corporal punishment has become part and parcel of the autocratic culture in the home, schools and society at large. Those who supported it quote the saying, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' (SCF-UK 2000: 35).

A survey conducted in Zimbabwe by SCF-UK (2000) revealed that children felt that authorities should talk to the children first, before they resort to physically punishing them. Corporal punishment creates an atmosphere of mistrust. In addition, research has shown that corporal punishment in schools can lead to what has been referred to as 'Educationally Induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – EIPSD', a combination of symptoms characterised by depression and anxiety, among others (Society for Adolescent Medicine 2003: 386). These views are relevant to the study reported in this paper.

THE STUDY

This study aimed at finding out the views and experiences of primary school children on issues of physical (corporal) and emotional (verbal/psychological) abuse and their understanding of the concept of human rights in general and children's rights in particular.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach in the collection and analysis of data from primary school children at two schools. The two schools were selected as case studies on issues of corporal punishment and verbal abuse in schools.

Selection of schools and student samples

A case study approach has the advantage that it involves an intensive or in-depth study of an issue (or issues) from an individual or groups in their natural settings (Denscombe 2002; 2007). For this study, two primary schools were randomly selected: one (School A) from a low socio-economic residential area (low-income suburb) generally regarded as 'a difficult area'; and a second one (School B) from a high-income (upper class socio-economic) residential suburb.

At the time of the study, School A had a population of 1 346 children between ages 6 and 12 years and distributed by gender as 685 boys and 661 girls. Among these were 30 prefects (15 girls and 15 boys). There were 34 teachers, 7 males and 27 females; excluding the head (male), the deputy head (female), a senior woman and a senior master. Each grade level, Grade 1 to Grade 7, was streamed into four classes of 45 children per class on average. Besides academic activities, pupils and teachers engaged in co-curricular activities such as soccer and netball. However, the

number of such activities was limited because of limited financial, material, space and personnel resources.

School B had a total of 468 children between ages 6 and 12 years, divided into 257 boys and 211 girls. Among these were 15 prefects (5 girls and 10 boys). Each grade level, from Grade 1 to Grade 7, was streamed into two classes of about 35 pupils each. There were 17 teachers in all, distributed as 4 male and 13 female. The head, deputy head and senior teacher were male and only one female, the senior woman, was part of the administration. This is in spite of the fact that there were more female than male teachers. This school enrolls children from different racial backgrounds, something not observed at School A. Children also take part in a variety of what is regarded as 'elite' sporting activities by Zimbabwean standards. These included hockey, cricket, rugby, lawn tennis, volleyball, basketball and soccer.

For this study, a total of 35 children were randomly selected from Grade 1 to Grade 7, distributed as: 18 from School A and 17 from School B. The head boy, deputy head boy, head girl and deputy head girl from each of the two schools were part of the sample.

Data collection

Data was collected through in-depth face-to-face interviews (Appendix: Interview schedule). Interviews in qualitative data collection have the advantage of bringing up the 'experiences and insights of participants' (Mncube and Harber 2013: 29). They generate information about attitudes, motives and emotions of children. Harris and Manatakis (2013) provide a detailed list of guiding principles to be considered when planning and preparing consultations with children at these ages, including issues of power, respect for the child, ethical considerations and appropriateness of materials. Questions were structured and clustered around the main themes of the study, that is, human rights, children's rights and physical and emotional abuse of children in schools. Consent to carry out the interviews with children was obtained from school headmasters and class teachers. In Zimbabwe, the school administration and teachers act in loco parentis in cases involving school children. Before the interviews, children were assured of their anonymity and that they would not be victimised by school authorities for the information they provided. They also had the right to withdraw from interviews if they did not wish to continue. During interviews, the researcher took down notes on the responses from each child.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved grouping children's responses according to questions on each of the themes identified on the interview schedule. Direct quotations of what children said are presented as part of the findings. While much of the data collection

was qualitative, involving direct quotations of what children said, the distribution of children on issues investigated is also noted in tables (see next section).

Findings

The data presented here represents pupils' views and experiences on issues of human rights, children's rights, corporal and emotional abuse in schools. During interviews and data analysis, it was noted that in some cases, there were clear differences between views of the children from School A and those from School B; between views of male and female children and between views of children who were prefects and those who were not prefects. In some cases, the Grade level in which the student was enrolled mattered (young children in the early grades as opposed to those in senior grades). Some of these differences are noted in the data presented here.

Verbal and emotional (psychological) abuse of children in schools

Four questions were on issues of child verbal and emotional (psychological) abuse in schools. The first sought to find out from pupils whether teachers ever shouted at them (Table 1).

Table 1: Children's views on teachers who shout at pupils

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
Do teachers shout at you or at any other children?			
Yes	15	13	28
Sometimes	0	2	2
Quite a lot	0	2	2
No	3	0	3
Total	18	17	35

The most common verbal insults from teachers at School A were:

'Shut up'

'Voetseke'

'Stupid'

'Dogs'

'Damn swine'

'Shit'

'Donkey'

'You fail to do such simple things, you must be a dog'

'You are dirty'

'Your big eyes'

'SASCAM' [Note: This is a derogatory reference to people with disability]

'Go home and do that work, swine'

'Big breasts'

'Some obscene words'

'Your ideas are like those of a grandmother'

Sometimes teachers would say bad things about children's parents and family backgrounds. From School B the following were cited as the most common examples:

'Keep quiet'

'Start all over again'

'Do your work quietly'

'Silly child'

'Stupid'

'Naughty kids'

'Go outside'

'Sit down, you silly child'

'You bloody idiots, you don't listen'

'Stop that; I will send you to the headmaster'

'Listen, don't fidget around'

'What kind of a home do you come from, idiot?'

'You butternut head'

'Silly'

'You are a dog'

While teachers at School B also shouted at children, as was the case with those at School A, it appears that few 'dirty' words were used at this school. Could this be

a result of the social class position of the school that can generally be described as 'elite'?

On why teachers shouted at children, a number of reasons were cited (Table 2).

Table 2: Reasons as to why teachers shout at pupils

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
What will have happened for teachers to shout at you?	10	10	20
a) Making noise in class	10	10	20
b) Not doing school (home) work	2	3	5
c) Mistakes in my class work	1	3	4
d) Child cannot provide a reason	5	1	6
Total	18	17	35

One pupil added, 'I feel very bad to be called a dog when everyone can see that I am human'.

Another pupil blamed it all on the teacher and said, 'Our teacher is old, any slight sound you make is noise to her'.

'How do you react when teachers shout at you?', children were asked. Some of the responses from school A were:

'I keep quiet'

'I feel scared'

'I feel frightened'

'I am emotionally pained'

'I feel sad'

'I feel unhappy'

'I feel angry'

'I report to grandma'

'I feel hurt'

'I report to the headmaster'.

Some pupils from school B said:

'I keep quiet'

'I feel scared'

'I read my books quietly'

'I do my school work'

'Some of us laugh'

'I obey what the teacher says'

'I feel bad and afraid.'

Corporal (physical) punishment of children in schools

All thirty-five children in the study confessed that some children were being deliberately naughty. 'What is naughty behaviour?', they were asked.

Children's views of what constitutes naughty behaviour

For these children, naughty behaviour included making noise, fighting, throwing litter on the floor or school grounds, not doing class work properly, and breaking windows. In some cases, children stood on tables and shouted at one another. Boys were accused of beating girls and shouting obscene language to prefects and other pupils. Other naughty behaviours included writing obscene language on desks and classroom walls, stealing from other pupils, jumping over the school wall, demanding protection money or food from small children, engaging in love affairs, coming to school late and not doing homework. Some would throw a wet and dirty ball against the school walls making them dirty. Others would run along corridors, deliberately making noise, while some played around with dangerous chemicals. Some children would push one another on the swing, resulting in others falling and getting hurt.

Children were also punished for swearing, backbiting, being rude to teachers, telling lies and teasing one another by violently grabbing someone's hat and running away with it.

How children are punished for these naughty activities

Teachers respond to these behaviours by applying a variety of disciplinary measures.

At School A, teachers would hit children using sticks, planks, hose pipes and hands on the buttocks. Some teachers used blackboard rulers and dusters to hit children on their knuckles. Others made children rub their hands hard on a rough wooden desk, pinched them or they were made to weed around the school grounds,

to pick up litter or were slapped on the face. Some children had their ears pulled, were kicked on the buttocks or were asked to wash toilet floors, sweep classrooms, had their hair pulled or were sent to the headmaster, who sometimes would ask the children to bring their parents.

Some teachers would simply ask children to either cut grass or dig in the garden, or they poked the children with a stick. In some cases, children would be asked to raise their hands above their heads for some time, or would be sent out of class or home. In other cases, they would be asked to carry thorny hedge cuttings from the school grounds.

One child at School B who had been sent to the headmaster for some beating had this to say: 'Sometimes the head just shouts at you or asks you to ask for forgiveness from the teacher. He may ask you to stand in his office for some time'.

Others would be made to stand and face the whole class for some time or were told not to come to school unless work has been done.

The school headmaster sometimes would ask the child to write an apology or to stay behind in class at tea or lunch break. He could also ask the child to run around the sports field for a number of times, to read the subject that the child finds most difficult or to sweep the classroom using a hard broom. Asked how they felt when all this happens, children from School A said:

'I feel pained in my heart'

'I get angry and feel like hitting back'

'It is not right, it hurts'

'I hate the teacher'

'Naughty kids deserve it'

'It's bad, especially being sent home for not having a book, because my parents don't have money to buy one.'

'It's bad to be sent out for asking a question'

'Beating is the worst, it's better to use other forms of punishment'.

On the same question children from school B said:

'I become frightened'

'I don't want to be punished'

'I feel sorry for those who are beaten, I feel like revenging'

'It's good for children who are naughty'

'It's fair; it is only bad when children are unfairly treated'

'I feel scared; it may be me one day'

'It is disappointing. Children must be talked to'

'I sympathise with them but sometimes children deserve it and it's good for them.'

Table 3 presents data on whether there are children who are singled out for corporal punishment as opposed to group punishment.

Table 3: Corporal punishment of pupils singled out of the rest of the group

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
Have you ever been naughty?			
a) Yes	7	11	18
b) No	2	5	7
c) Cannot remember	9	1	10
Total	18	17	35
Have you ever been punished			
a) Yes	8	12	20
b) No	1	4	5
c) Cannot remember	9	1	10
Total	18	17	35
Have you ever been beaten			
a) Yes	10	12	22
b) No	0	5	5
c) Cannot remember	8	0	8
Total	18	17	35

Asked to state when they were last beaten, children's responses varied:

'This term'

'This year'

'Last term'

'Last year'

'I was in Grade 6'.

On how often they had been beaten, they responded:

'Five times'

'Many times'

'More than five times'

'Once'

'Three times'.

Unlike at secondary school level where different teachers teach different subjects to the same classes, at the primary school level one teacher is assigned to and is in charge of a class for the whole year and for all subjects that pupils take. Thus, if the teacher is male or female and if he/she often beats children, they have to put up with that teacher for the whole year. In such a situation, pupils' responses to the question 'Was the teacher male or female?' depended on the sex of the teacher assigned to a particular class. As noted previously, there are more female than male teachers in the schools in this study. For this reason, pupils' responses to the above question seemed to implicate female teachers more than they did males. However, this is not to imply that female teachers are more susceptible to punishing children than males, but that there are more female teachers at the primary school level than there are males, the 'feminisation' of teaching at the primary school level. The assumption may be that female teachers would play their 'mother roles' with children at these levels.

'Would you like your parents to know if ever you get physically punished?'

Table 4 presents pupils' responses to this question.

Table 4: Corporal punishment and the role of parents

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
Do your parents know that you were beaten?			
a) Yes	8	10	18
b) No	3	3	6
c) I have never been beaten	7	4	11
Total	18	17	35
Do you want them to know?			
a) Yes	3	10	13
b) No	8	3	11
c) Not sure	7	4	11
Total	18	17	35

For those whose parents knew that their children were being physically punished, it was the school administration that had informed the parents. The rest of the children, 17, said they themselves had reported to their parents.

As Table 4 shows, parents of six children did not know that their children were being beaten. In fact, 11 children did not want their parents to know. Of the 18 children who had reported to their parents, only four said their parents had come to the schools to inquire. The rest, 14, said their parents had, in fact, accused children of being mischievous. Some parents went on to say:

‘That should make you improve’

‘You should not misbehave again’

‘Next time you will have to finish your homework’

‘You deserved it’.

One pupil said, ‘I was banned from watching television and was further asked to do my laundry.’

Children's views on corporal punishment and gender

Questions in this section sought children's views on corporal punishment with regards to the gender of the offender and on whether corporal punishment should be banned in schools or not. Table 5 shows the distribution of pupils on these questions. Only five pupils from School A provided their views on his question.

Table 5: Views on gender, corporal punishment and future of corporal punishment

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
Corporal punishment must be applied to			
a) Boys only	0	2	2
b) Girls only	0	0	0
c) Both boys and girls	5	15	20
d) No response	13	0	13
Total	18	17	35
Corporal punishment in schools must be abolished			
a) Yes	1	5	6
b) No	4	10	14
c) Not sure	0	2	2

d) No response	13	0	13
Total	18	17	35

On why both boys and girls should be corporally punished some provided reasons like:

‘To be fair’

‘We are equals’

‘Generally both boys and girls misbehaved’

‘One group will laugh at the other or revenge on the other’

‘We do most things together except domestic science’

‘One group may think they can get away with trouble.’

Two pupils preferred that only boys be beaten because

‘Girls do not do serious offences; only when they do serious offences should they be beaten up.’

On whether corporal punishment in schools should be banned or not, 14 children said it should not be banned, because there would be more mischief among children without it.

Six thought it should be banned as they felt that children suffer a lot of physical pain from corporal punishment. Some children get hurt and as they cry this causes a lot of emotional pain to others, they went on to say.

The role of prefects in the maintenance of discipline in schools

The next five questions sought to find out pupils' views on the role that prefects played in maintaining discipline in schools. Prefects make sure that discipline is maintained in the school area and play fields. They check on children who make noise, steal or fight. They write down offenders' names later to be read out at assembly and send these to administration or janitors for punishment. Prefects also make sure that children follow school rules such as lining up children for and after assembly. They punished pupils by making them run around sports fields or sweep classrooms and pick litter from the school area. Prefects see to it that there is order in classrooms, the school area and play fields; check on whether children are in uniform; help teachers during fundraising activities; help during Parents-Teacher-Association (PTA) meetings and at the tuck shop and look after young children before their parents come to take them after school.

On whether or not prefects are allowed to beat up naughty children, only two of the 35 children were not sure. The rest responded with a strong 'No'. They went on to say that if prefects ever beat children, they would definitely be reported either to the headmaster, deputy headmaster, Teacher-in Charge (T.I.C), 'my class teacher', any other teacher, or parents. They were sure that some disciplinary action would be taken against such a prefect. Three children thought the prefect may, in fact, get suspended from their duties.

One added, 'The prefect would be expelled from school.'

Children's understanding of human and children's rights

The first two questions in this section asked pupils on whether they liked school or not and to provide reasons for their opinions. Table 6 shows their distribution on these questions.

Table 6: Children's views on why they go to school.

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
1. Do you like school			
a) Yes	18	17	35
b) No	0	0	0
Total	18	17	35
2. Reasons			
a) To learn new ideas	6	4	10
b) For a good job	12	3	15
c) To play games with friends	0	10	10
Total	18	17	35

All the children in this study firmly indicated that they liked school, with 10 saying they went to school because they wanted to learn new ideas. Specific subjects were mentioned. These are Mathematics, Content and Shona (vernacular language). Six

out of ten were from School A, while 4 were from School B. Twelve from School A cited 'future job opportunities' as the main reasons for going to school, while three from School B cited job opportunities as their reason for going to school. All 10 who cited 'friends at school' were from School B.

'Do you know what a right is? Give an example of one right of a child'. Table 7 shows the distribution of children on these questions.

Table 7: Children's conception and examples of children's rights

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
1. Do you know what a right is?			
a) Yes	8	7	15
b) No	7	7	14
c) Not Sure	3	3	6
Total	18	17	35
4. Examples of human right			
a) Children able to provide examples	9	13	22
b) Children unable to provide examples	9	4	13
Total	18	17	35

The 22 children who were able to provide examples of human rights mentioned the right 'to report to our parents those teachers who beat us up'. Teachers come to school to teach and not to beat children, they said. Also mentioned were the right to education, entertainment, to work, to go to church, to clothing and health. Children mentioned the right to be looked after by parents, to food, to free association, to a home, and not to be overworked and to fair treatment. In addition, they mentioned the right to speak one's mind, to vote, to choose and not to be touched.

Table 8 shows the distribution of children and their opinions on questions concerning the use of corporal punishment by teachers with regards to children's rights.

Table 8: Pupils' opinions on the use of corporal punishment by teachers

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
5. Are teachers allowed to beat children?			
a) Yes	10	12	22
b) No	5	5	10
c) I do not know	3	0	3
Total	18	17	35
6. Can you report teachers who beat up children?			
a) Yes	6	10	16
b) No	10	7	17
c) I do not know	2	0	2
Total	18	17	35
7. Who can you report to?			
a) Parents	7	6	13
b) School Administrators and Teachers	4	5	9
c) Other organisations	0	2	2
d) I do not know	6	0	6
e) We cannot report teachers	1	4	5
Total	18	17	35

Twenty-two pupils thought that teachers are permitted by headmasters, deputy headmasters, parents and government to beat children. They, however, also added that teachers are not supposed to harm children when they beat them. The 10 pupils who said teachers are not allowed to beat children pointed out that it is not their job to do so. Seventeen thought that if they reported it, the teacher would, in fact, punish them further, so they would rather not report. Sixteen children said they had a right to report teachers who beat them but felt they could not do so for this same reason. Thirteen children chose to tell their parents because they felt freer reporting to their parents than to other authorities. However, they added that sometimes parents simply blamed it on the children. Because of this one pupil said, 'I kept it to myself and my friends.'

Table 9: Children's opinions on the teaching of human rights in schools

Question and Responses	School A	School B	Total
Human rights should be taught in schools			
Yes	6	16	22
No	0	0	0
Not Sure	12	1	13
Total	18	17	35
Why do you say that?			
So that we know them	6	14	20
Cannot say why	12	3	15
Total	18	17	35
Are pupils to be consulted on some school decisions			
Yes	3	14	17
No	4	1	5
Not sure	11	2	13
Total	18	17	35

On questions concerning the teaching of human rights in schools, 12 of those who were not sure were in the lower classes at School A, that is, Grades One to Four. Twenty-two pupils preferred to have human rights taught in schools. Children could only avoid certain unacceptable behaviours if they knew their rights from an early age, they said. One pupil added, 'So that adults would not mistreat children'.

Asked whether they wanted to be consulted on some school decisions, 17 said they wanted to be consulted, five did not want and 13 were not sure. The five who did not want to be consulted believed that teachers have always had the final authority, thus it was not necessary to consult pupils. If pupils were consulted, they would end up resisting school rules that should benefit them and their future lives, they said. The 17 who wanted to be consulted suggested that this should be done on school rules; the painting of the school buildings; teachers who should transfer and those who should remain; fund raising activities, sports and other games.

One pupil put it as follows: 'We must be consulted on everything that takes place in the school'.

'Do you know of any one organisation which helps children learn about human and children's rights?' Their responses to this question are presented on Table 10.

Table 10: Organisations that help children learn about human and children's rights

Organisation	School A	School B	Total
a) I do not know of any	14	7	21
b) Child line	4	6	10
c) Police	0	3	3
d) UNICEF	0	1	1
Total	18	17	35

Here, again, those who could not name any organisation were in the lower grades. This was especially so at School A (14 pupils) compared with School B (7 pupils).

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It was noted in a previous section that the two schools in this study differed in a number of ways: location (low density/high density), social class background (low income/high income) and school size (numbers of children and teachers). There is, however, one common factor between the two schools: gender. In both schools there are more female than male teachers and yet both schools have male head teachers, perhaps a reflection of male domination in positions demanding authority and power. The location factor also has some historical significance. During the colonial period, School A was administered by the then Division of African Education while School B was administered by the Division of European Education. While these 'divisions' have been abolished since independence, these colonial policies still have some underlying influence on what goes on in the schools today, including the way children are disciplined. The location factor cited above is also linked to social class: generally, most children at School B come from high income families, while those at School A are from working class backgrounds. This is also reflected in the way children at the two schools are treated. It is most likely that these differences also influence parents' and teachers' attitudes towards what goes on in schools, including how teachers discipline children. However, in spite of these differences in social class, Morrell (2010: 41) warns that 'what affects the urban ghetto today will some day come to a Wal-Mart near you' meaning that, for this study, what is happening at School A, a working class area, may someday happen at School B as well. In addition, Leoschut (2008), cited in SACE (2011: 7), points out that 'what transpires in the context of schools is usually a reflection of what is taking place in the broader social context in which schools are found'. This is likely to be the case for these schools, located in a society where reports of violent clashes in the broader society appear in the media now and again. The broader society and people in authority seem to condone corporal punishment as means of disciplining offenders.

In a large school such as School A, teachers' main concerns are about keeping school children under control. Results from this study show that more 'vulgar' verbal insults are used at School A than was the case at School B. This is similarly noted in the case of Botswana, where large school classes have influenced teachers' choice of disciplinary measures – corporal punishment (Harber 2010: 12). This may also be linked to the social class factor discussed above. Research elsewhere has also shown that the use of corporal punishment in society, and in schools in particular, is a reflection of male dominance in society (Humphreys 2006). While the majority of teachers at the two schools in this study are females, the administration in each of the schools is headed by males, (at School B there is only one female in the administration), confirming the above view about masculine dominance in decision-making, including how children in schools are disciplined. However, with regards to who gets physically and verbally punished, children in this study do not seem to see a distinction between how girls and boys are punished. Teachers seem to punish students in the same way, regardless of gender and children seem to see this as the right thing to do because 'we are equals; to be fair', they said. However, Humphreys (2006) noted that because of the fear of being punished, girls in Botswana schools were often withdrawn and silent, leading to teachers labelling them as 'shy' and 'lazy'.

This study has revealed that there was an almost equal number of pupils who could and those could not say what a right is. However, a majority of them was able to name specific examples of human and children's rights. The study also shows that children are aware of the various ways in which they are abused. They were able to name some abuses that they experienced within the school system.

The study has revealed that corporal punishment and psychological abuse are rampant in the two case study schools, in spite of laws in place against this practice. This is evidenced by the various and sometimes emotional narratives from pupils who were involved in the study. Various methods of disciplining children are used for the various offences of which children are convicted in the school environment.

Children have also revealed that in some cases, reporting cases of child abuses to parents does not help, since some parents go on to blame the children or even punish the child with the same disciplinary measures they are subjected to in schools. Yet, against this background, very few children know of organisations that can assist them when they face these problems, both at school and at home. Amazingly, the majority of children recommended that corporal punishment should stay in force and that it be applied equally to both boys and girls. This is the only way that can make children behave in socially acceptable ways at school and in society, they said in support. Is this a carry-over of what has been mentioned elsewhere in this paper as the 'cultural assumption that children should be seen and not heard' (Alston 1994: 200)?

Commenting on the role that educators can play, UNICEF (2005) advises that people who know their rights are better able to claim them. Educators are in the best position to help children learn about their rights. Yet the UNICEF report (2010: 18) concludes that 'the wide spread use of corporal punishment is a good example of an issue that contravenes the provisions of CRC but remains protected by the failings of the regulation framework'. Educators can also be good role models in respecting the dignity and integrity of children. From findings in this study, it appears that more still needs to be done in Zimbabwean schools regarding the teaching and respect of children's rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the various findings of this study. Some are, in fact, suggestions from children themselves.

Over half of children involved in this study were able to name specific examples of human and children's rights. At the same time, over half recommend that issues of human rights, children's rights and child abuse be taught in schools as part of their school curriculum. This is because knowledge of their rights is important for them to distinguish between abusive and non-abusive treatment by teachers and others from outside the school system. Besides, as they grow into adulthood, this would equip them with skills on how to treat their own children and other people in society without infringing their rights. Teaching children about children's rights should include consulting children themselves on issues that concern them. Less than half think that they should be consulted, while others were not sure whether they should or should not be consulted. This may result from the fact that policy is not clear on this issue.

Teaching human rights in schools empowers children against teachers and administrators who have a tendency to physically and psychologically torture children. At the moment, children think that these people are allowed by government to inflict such disciplinary measures against them. They seem not to be informed that, in fact, there is a government regulation barring teachers from employing such methods of disciplining children. Thus, few children are aware that they have a right to report persons who carry out these forms of discipline on them.

The majority of pupils did not know of any organisation that helps children whose rights have been abused. It is recommended that existing organisations that have to do with children's welfare should make an effort to go out into schools and communities where they can talk to and get known by children whom they are to benefit. For children who come from families where the electronic media (radio and television) are available, these are important agents that can inform children about their rights. The media needs to be accessible to them all without restrictions.

Slightly over half the children in this study acknowledged that their parents are aware of how they are being punished in schools. However, while some would want their parents to know, others do not. This is because, while in some cases parents sympathize with children, others are not sympathetic. It is recommended that parents investigate reports from children on abusive punishments they are subjected to in schools. Parents, together with organisations that help children in these matters, have to take steps to find out from school authorities how children are disciplined and recommend approaches that do not infringe children's rights.

Some children think that corporal punishment does not have to be abolished completely in schools and should be applied to both boys and girls as a deterrent to mischievous pupils. However, others recommend dialogue as an alternative to disciplining mischievous children, rather than through corporal punishment. This study recommends the latter rather than the former. The suggestion by some pupils for the continued use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure may arise from the fact that they have not been exposed enough to alternative means of solving disputes. Unfortunately, even at the family, community, national and international levels, more is heard from the media about how disputes are settled through physical violence (punishment) and less through dialogue.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Personal details

1. Sex.....
2. Age.....
3. Class.....

Theme A: Children's rights

1. Do you like school?
2. Why do you say that?
3. Do you know what a right is?
4. Give examples of any three rights that you know of.
5. Are teachers allowed to beat children?
6. Can you report teachers who beat children?
7. Who can you report to?
8. Human rights must be taught in schools. What is your view?
9. Why do you say that?
10. Do you think pupils have to be consulted on some school decisions as part of their rights?
11. If yes, which decisions do you have in mind for instance?
12. Name some organisations you know of that help children learn about their rights.

Theme B: Physical (corporal) punishment

1. Are there any naughty children in your school?
2. What are the naughty things that they do?

3. Do teachers punish children when they are naughty?
4. How are they punished?
5. What are your feelings when teachers do this to children?
6. Have you ever been naughty yourself?
7. Have you ever been punished at one stage in your life?
8. Have teachers beaten you for being naughty?
9. When?
10. How often?
11. What were you beaten with?
12. Was the teacher male or female?
13. How did you feel?
14. Do your parents know about this?
15. If not, would you want them to know about this?
16. If they know how did they come to know?
17. What were their reactions?
18. Has your class as a whole ever been subjected to any disciplinary action?
19. If yes, which ones was the class subjected to?
20. Why was the class punished?
21. Do beatings occur in your class or school?
22. On which part of the body was this done?
23. What would have happened?

24. What is your view on the following? Corporal punishment must be applied to :
 - a. Boys only
 - b. Girls only
 - c. Both boys and girls
25. Why have you said that?
26. Corporal punishment must be abolished from schools completely. What is your view on this?
27. Why do you say that?
28. What are the responsibilities of prefects in maintaining discipline in the school?
29. Are prefects allowed to beat children who are naughty?
30. What do they use to beat children if they are allowed?
31. Are children allowed to report prefects who beat children?
32. Who do you report to?

Theme C: Verbal and emotional abuse

1. Do teachers shout at you or at any other children in the school?
2. What are some of the things they say when they shout at children?
3. What will have happened?
4. What do you and these other children do when teachers shout at children?

END