Perception of parents and teachers on practice of corporal punishment in primary schools in Rwanda: Focus on disciplinary processes

Corporal punishment is executed all over the world despite governments’ and legal bodies’ initiatives to completely eradicate the practice for effective functioning of children. Execution of corporal punishment violates children’s right to freedom from violence, right to health, growth and development. Human rights groups, International bodies and professionals continuously advocate against use of corporal punishment in homes, schools and child caring institutions for well being of children. This is based on the premise that Corporal punishment in many countries has become a custom in schools and homes where children’s rights and freedoms are violated and abused. In Rwanda, corporal punishment targeting children at home and in schools is rampant and has been cited in various documents as a notable challenge facing preventing and responding to child abuse. This study examined perceptions of teachers and parents on practice of corporal punishment in primary schools in Rwanda. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Secondary data was obtained through review of critical policy documents. Using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), descriptive statistics were used in data analysis. Findings showed that practice of corporal punishment is considered appropriate in educational settings and is widespread in homes and communities for correction of disruptive behaviour. This study recommends for adoption positive discipline which includes; introduction of sustainable civic awareness of long term effects of corporal punishment and adoption of non-violent, acceptable, effective and nurturing parenting styles. Further, Rwanda should introduce public awareness and social mobilization programmes to sensitize schools and communities on harmful effects of corporal punishment. Further studies should be conducted on long-term effects of corporal punishment.

Key words: Corporal punishment, disciplinary processes, perceptions, parents, teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the rights of the child (CRC, 1989) defines corporal punishment as any physical force no matter how light used with the intention of causing pain and discomfort whether involving smacking, slapping or spanking. Corporal punishment which is invariably humiliating inflicts deliberate physical and emotional pain and distress as a result of coming to school late, missing school without permission, having dirty or torn uniform,
rudeness, fighting, stealing, drug abuse, or any form of disrupting behavior among children. Marrow and Singh (2014) indicates that corporal punishment may involve striking learners across the buttocks or palms by use of wicker cane, wooden paddle, slipper, leather strap or wooden yard-stick.

Further, Marcus (2014) opined that spanking or smacking learners with an open hand especially in junior schools as a result of undesirable behavior is a form of corporal punishment which should be prohibited. However, teachers and parents acknowledge that use of corporal punishment provides an immediate response to indiscipline which enables the learner to continue with learning unlike when suspended from school. Based on this premise, policy makers in schools employ corporal punishment for controlling learner behavior and achievement, class control, respect for teachers and for improving moral character development. In this regard, medical practitioners, psychologists and human rights groups indicates that corporal punishment has long term effects which interferes with learning leading to antisocial behavior as well as mental distress, (Gershoff, 2017). This is based on realization that corporal punishment violates children's rights to freedom from violence, increases antisocial behavior, causes body injuries and creates hostile environment for breeding criminal activities. Hence, Rwanda's Vision 2050 focuses on promoting children's well being, quality of life, social equity and human rights which includes abolishing all forms corporal punishment for sustainable development.

Prohibiting corporal punishment is in line with articles 19, 23(2) and 37 of CRC which require state parties to protect children from any form of physical or mental violence and instead promote positive non-violent discipline in the family, schools and in all learning institutions for positive living. In an effort to achieve this, Durrant (2013) proposed for legal institutions to sensitize governments, teacher training institutions as well as community mobilizations in safe-guarding rights of children against corporal punishments. In support of this recommendation, Owen (2015) suggested for adoption of positive discipline for behavior modification which may include; alterations to school environments, positive support from teachers and reinforcing appropriate behavior for empowering learners to be creative, make decision and develop self-discipline. Whereas positive discipline requires development of appropriate relationships, instructional methodologies adopted in educational settings should respect rights and guarantees of learners by eliminating all forms of abuse, ill treatment and cruel inhuman punishment. Conversely, Oganda and Pells (2015) affirmed that parents find corporal punishment to be a means of discipline which is effective in dealing with domestic disobedience despite UCIFEF’s (2014) initiative to stop violence against children in Rwanda. In addition, Gershoff and Grogan (2016) observed that corporal punishment has been used by teachers and parents as a means of controlling and correcting children's behavior instead of nurturance and responsive care giving practices for supporting effective living. Gershoff and Grogan (2016) study cited reasons why teachers and parents use corporal punishment which vary from demographics, inadequate knowledge, negative attitude and childhood experiences. Therefore continual use of corporal punishment violates fundamental rights of respect for human dignity and physical integrity among learners.

In Rwanda, corporal punishment both in schools and homes has not been abolished but prohibited in the penal system as a sentence for crime not as a disciplinary measure. The Government of Rwanda was found to be one of the child-friendly governments in Africa and was ranked 11th in the Child-friendliness Index out of 52 of African governments. This was mainly for three reasons: first, the Government has put in place appropriate legal provisions to protect children against abuse and exploitation; secondly, it has shown fair commitment in allocating a relatively higher share of the national budget to provide for the basic needs of children; and thirdly, there has been effort and success in achieving favourable wellbeing outcomes as reflected in children article 19, 23 (2) and 37 of CRC.

However, Gershoff, (2017) observed that prohibition has not been achieved in the home, schools, penal institutions and alternative care settings. Indeed, Article 347 of the Civil Code confirms parents' “right of correction” which exposes children to corporal punishment and fails to provide appropriate disciplinary measures. In addition, provisions against violence and abuse in the Penal Code (1977), Law No. 27 Relating to Right Protection of the Child against Violence and the Constitution (2003) are not interpreted as prohibiting all corporal punishment against children. This provision should be repealed, and explicit prohibition of all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment in the home and other settings where adults have authority over children be enacted.

Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of children (2012) pointed out that learners subjected to corporal punishment tend to be aggressive, bully peers in school, proffer to antisocial behavior and commit violent crimes. Further still, Committee on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights (2013) found out that corporal punishment is less effective in behavioral management as compared to positive role modeling in developing character, respect, and values among children. As a result, schools that advocate for corporal punishment experience increased aggressive and destructive behavior, vandalism, inadequate learning achievement, weak attention span, increased drop-out rate, school avoidance and phobia, low self esteem, anxiety and retaliation against teachers, (Ogado et al., 2015). On the other hand, in schools and communities with effective communication and involvement of children in decision making, supervision and conflicts are minimized. In support of child friendly institutions, Rwanda's Vision 2050 focuses on child’s rights and well being as indicators for sustainable development and social prosperity for effective living. Based on this background, this study explored,
conceptualization of corporal punishment, forms of corporal punishment, institutions practicing corporal punishment and practice of corporal punishment by immediate role models.

**Conceptualization of Corporal Punishment**

Corporal punishment is perceived as component of the educative and disciplinary process often viewed as character building for generating respect and responsibility among children. According to Marcus (2014), parents do not perceive corporal punishment as violation of child’s right but as part of child rearing which improves performance and corrects disruptive behaviour. In a study on the dilemma of corporal punishment, Dereje et al. (2014) found out that communities practice it for social control and gender role socialization. This is despite Committee on the Rights of the child (2006) emphasis on non-discrimination, best interest of the child, right to survival, development and respect for human dignity and harmonious living for every child. But society in general supports the notion of ‘spare the cane and spoil the child,’ and believes the ban on corporal punishment is the reason for decline of morals in society.

However, Gershoff (2017) observed that in societies where individuals practice violence for socially approved purposes, people are more likely to apply hostility for reasons not accepted within society. In a study on school violence, Pontalti (2013) reported that on average, 48% of Rwandan children received physical punishment in schools, while 58% of boys and 66% girls had been kicked and punched by adults in homes, threatened by parents and slapped. In support of this contention, Mina (2013) indicated that in homes and schools, children are disciplined through beating, denied food, shouted at, insulted, forced to perform hard work, chased out of the house and not allowed to attend school. However, Ogbe (2015) affirmed that teachers use corporal punishment to mould child’s behaviour in order to build a responsible society so long as the punishment is reasonable. Reasons cited for use of corporal punishment include, dropping litter, wearing incorrect uniform, losing books, failure to complete homework and making noise while in class. Hence, inappropriate discipline or failure of teachers to address causes of misbehaviour requires professional interventions and conducive learning environments that respect human dignity.

**Forms of Corporal Punishment**

Hardy (2004) noted that caning is the popular form of corporal punishment consisting of numerous strikes on buttocks, hands, shoulders and on soles of the feet which have long lasting negative effects. Additionally, Oganda and Pells (2015) observed that teachers use canning, slapping, kicking, scratching, pulling hair or ears, pinching and whipping to maintain discipline and punish children for poor academic performance. Bruises and cuts are regular end products of school punishment with severe injuries including broken bones, knocked out teeth and internal bleeding which cause long term emotional distress. Further reports showed that children are forced to kneel down in front of the class for long hours as a form of discipline even though it disrupts learning. Many schools and teachers make children to engage in physical labour as a punishment which includes, digging trenches, slashing grass and uprooting tree stumps, cleaning toilets with no detergents and protective gloves. According to Mendez et al. (2016), other forms of corporal punishment may include, slapping, pinching, pulling, burning, spanking, hitting, making a child to eat soap, hot sauce or unpleasant substances. Despite Rwanda’s commitment to prohibiting corporal punishment, Committee on the Rights of the Child report (2006) showed that outburst of teachers who use violence as forms of punishment affects emotional behavior and weakens academic achievement of learners. The report further revealed that beating with chains, kneeling down, slapping with hands, knocking the head and pulling ears are the methods of corporal punishments practiced in Rwanda. All these forms of punishment represent violation of human right, torture and cruel inhuman degradation of dignity and physical integrity. As a result, learners remain silent due to fear and escalate to violence as an outburst of personal frustration.

Pinheiro (2006) noted that constructive improvements have been witnessed in many counties with legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in families and in learning institutions for sustainable development. A report on working towards universal prohibition of corporal punishment (2018) showed that 53 states have achieved full prohibition and 56 have committed to law reform while 10% of children in the world live in states that recognize rights and protection from all forms of violence and to equal protection from physical attack. More still, Gershoff and Font (2016) noted that an estimated 128 countries in Europe, South and East Asia have outlawed corporal punishment in schools and in families due to its emotional and psychological effects. Further still, Straus (2014) noted that national commissions in America, Germany, Australia, South Africa and United Kingdom have recommended ending corporal punishment as critical steps towards reducing violence in society. In Finland, Osterman (2014) observed that all forms of corporal punishment and parental violence against children were prohibited in 1983 which led to decline in the number of children who were assaulted. Governments should therefore emphasize on absolute human rights obligation to ensure that the law protects all children from any form of abuse with full protection of their human dignity.

**Administration of Corporal Punishment**

Statistics documented by UNICEF 2005-2013 in 62 countries show that violence is the most common form of discipline against children practiced in homes and schools, (Oganda and Pells, 2015). Further, the report showed that
one in five children aged between 3-14 have experienced violent discipline by being hit on the head, face, ears, pinching, pulling hair, biting and forcing them to live in hostile environments. In USA, Bezique, Meldrum, Darling-Churchill and Stuart-Cassel (2015) found out that in 50 states where corporal punishment was permitted, learners were more than twice as likely to die in a school shooting where it was prohibited. In Canada, Trome (2010) pointed out that harsh parental practices of being hit, slapped, scolded and name calling contributed to boys becoming perpetrators of violence between ages 16-17. In addition, Parkes (2015) indicated that in Botswana, Ghana, Peru, Tanzania and South Africa, practice of corporal punishment has produced vicious and inhuman masculinities and submissive femininities cruel to the society. Through interviews with students from India, Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, Marrow and Singh (2014) revealed that corporal punishment is the origin of adolescents to dislike teachers, experience inadequate concentration in learning, perform poorly and drop out of school. All these forms of corporal punishment should be prohibited completely in all societies for children to progress to adult life as functioning and participating citizens for sustainable development.

In a study in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, Mexico and Rwanda, Contreras (2012) affirmed that children who had experienced corporal punishment during childhood were more likely to be involved in fights, robberies, and demonstrate low self-esteem and depression. Therefore, Gebru, and Gebreslassie, (2017) revealed that corporal punishment which is practiced in several countries of Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Europe, Latin America Middle East and North America contravene human rights of children causing detrimental long lasting effects. This is despite of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2007) declaration that corporal punishment is a violation of the CRC article 19 on protection of all physical and mental violence.

Corporal Punishment by Immediate Role Models

Reports by UNICEF (2014) revealed that globally an estimated 300 million children aged 2-4 receive physical discipline from parents and care givers on regular basis in order to educate the child. Care givers use apparatus such as paddles, belts or canes to inflict corporal punishment on children without caring about the socio-emotional effects. In support of this argumentation, Murray et al. (2009) showed that mothers beat, hit, spank or slap, and scald children while fathers smack on the head instead of the buttocks or limbs to control violent behaviour. Such severe forms of corporal punishment constitute child abuse with adverse effects including depression, aggression, physical abuse and anti-social behaviour. In concurrence, UNICEF (2011) noted that fathers who practiced corporal punishment had sons who were physically aggressive with peers, while mothers who employed psychological control had daughters who were both physically and emotionally aggressive. This is despite the fact that responsibility of rising and protecting children from any form of violence is vested upon parents who should practice positive discipline measures rather than use corporal punishment which dehumanizes and causes emotional distress. Conversely, Saunders (2013) opined that cultural and community norms influence care givers’ use of corporal punishment for correcting misbehaviour among children. In addition, UNICEF (2014) found out that care givers in homes engage in violent, cruel and punitive child discipline practices such as name calling, humiliation, shouting, yelling and screaming instead of discussing misbehaviour with the child. Corporal punishment weakens positive relationships and creates sense of susceptibility to actions of care givers which is considered a typical and expected experience of childhood.

Statement of the Problem

The government of Rwanda has rarified international human rights instruments prohibiting corporal punishment which is also represented in the constitution. A commitment to children’s rights is acknowledged through establishment of National Commission for Children and Development of Integrated Child Rights Policy. However, the Rwandan Civil Code appears to legalize corporal punishment through parents’ ‘rights of correction’. Parents have a right of correction under article 347 of law No. 42, where children have limited protection from violence and abuse under that Penal Code and Law No. 27 concerning the rights to protection against violence. In this regard, corporal punishment is lawful in families under Law No. 32/2016 of 28/08/2016. This is because Rwanda does not acknowledge corporal punishment at home as a problem that requires state intervention. The same right to correct children is given to any adult educating a child, including teachers. Article 347 of Law No. 7 fails to provide neither guidance nor extent of the correction while the penal code law no 54 on child rights gives parents freedom to apply corporal punishment. Further still, the penal code, which is now article 28 of the 2018 Law has failed to provide complete prohibition on corporal punishment. As a result, children continue to suffer such punishment as the laws are not clear. In addition, inadequate support from policy makers, persistent poverty provides predicaments for children.

Purpose and Objectives

This study analyzed perceptions of teachers and parents on practice of corporal punishment in Rwandan schools, homes, communities as well as childcare institutions. Specifically, the objective of the study was to explore practices and attitudes of teachers towards corporal punishments in primary schools and communities in Rwanda.
Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory incorporates observation, imitation and assimilation of information from environment in order to make decisions about the observed phenomenon, (Bandura, 1978). Principles of social learning theory emphasize that cognition and environment influence the behavior modeled through rehearsing. Based on this view, Bandura (1997) acknowledged that children acquire behavior through regular and reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences. The concept of modeling requires studying other individuals within the environment for establishing how new behaviors are learned and nurtured. Drawing from Bandura (1978), Felson and Lane (2009) noted that through exposure to the environment, children attain symbolic image of the molded behavior which in turn influence their activities. Molded behavior has the potential to influence children's thoughts and later on to imitate the observed actions whether acceptable by society or not. In this regard, parents who use corporal punishment have children who exhibit aggression due to the cruel experiences that have been exposed to. This is based on the premise that children view corporal punishment as a symbolic representation of how to deal with inappropriate behavior. On the other hand Illhavenil and Aravindan (2015) affirmed that teachers and parents who provide appropriate, compassionate and nurturing parental environment encourage children’s positive behaviors through role modeling and reinforcement for effective living. As noted by Bandura (2009), given that modeling is a means through which individuals correspond to authentic outcomes symbolically, children who have experienced ill-treatment are more likely to participate in sexual offences. In support of this contention, Lansford (2012) expressed that corporal punishment is associated with higher levels of child externalizing behavior from the immediate environment. Such children are likely to suffer from difficulties with attachment, regressive behavior, anxiety, depression violence and aggression which influence interaction within the environment.

Social learning theory presents a structure for acknowledging the evolution of aggression since societal values, norms, cultures and behavior are learned. According to Paolucci and Violato (2004), children exposed to cruel discipline recognize violence as an appropriate means of solving challenges in society. By practicing physical and psychological punishment, aggressive behaviors are reproduced among children which extent to adulthood. This is based on the understanding that learned behavior is often imitated and can contribute to success, novelty, and at times violence. Hence, Gamez-Guadix et al. (2011) asserted that parents who use violent forms of discipline expose children to model aggression to control the environment. In support of this assertion, Marcos et al. (2016) indicated that corporal punishment and child abuse have been used in explaining why some children are violent compared to those who adopt appropriate means in conflict resolution.

The unacceptable behaviour of children should be rectified using appropriate discipline which include: providing clear guidelines, modeling appropriate behavior, and reinforcing good behaviors. Through positive discipline; children accept the established societal norms and values, become rational and accountable for their actions which guarantees continuity of learning and willingness to trust own judgment.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed methods approach with emphasis on the qualitative aspects employing Focus Groups Discussions, documents review and in-depth interviews. The quantitative methodology was part of the semi structured interviews. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Study Setting

Rwanda is a country that is located in Central Africa, on the Eastern side of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its provinces were recently reorganized into five namely, Eastern, Western, Southern, Northern and Kigali city. It covers about 26,338Km² with a population of about 10 million. However, the study was conducted in all sites of ‘HAGURUKA’ an Association for the Defense of Women’s and Children’s Rights namely: Huye, Gasabo, Kayonza, Musanze, Muhanga and Rusizi Districts.

Sampling Procedures

The respondents of the study included parents, teachers, local leaders, people working in hospitals or health centres (doctors or social workers), people working in the justice sector, children, police, civil society, child care institutions and the relevant Ministries that work towards abolishing as well as preventing use of corporal punishment. Table 1 shows the sampled population of the study:

Parents from households were randomly selected while other respondents were purposively sampled based on respective responsibilities or involvement in creating awareness against child physical abuse. Purposive sampling is used when the study seeks to highlight specific characteristics within a pre determined study population as in the case of this study.

Data collection

Both primary and secondary data were used for this study. A desktop review was done to gather literature for establishing the theoretical basis of the study. Primary data however was collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Interviews. The Focus group discussions were held with parents while for the other respondents, open structured interviews were conducted.
Table 1. Type and number of study respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number of respondents per site</th>
<th>Total number of respondents in all sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Households</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Justice sector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Health sector</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Civil society</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Local leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Houseboys/girls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>476</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis

The collected data was received and verified for effectiveness and clarity before recoding of open ended responses. Qualitative data was then transcribed into the Microsoft (MS) Word computer programme and analyzed using collation, thematic descriptions and summary judgments. Quantitative data on the other hand was entered into the SPSS template and cleaned after which thematic outputs were generated in form of frequencies and cross tabulations. Descriptive analyses have been conducted to compare the outcomes in the five districts among the various categories of the respondents. The findings were presented using tables, bar charts and pie charts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents comparison of the study findings discussed based on five sampled districts and categorized respondents. The findings are presented under the following thematic areas: Perception on use of corporal punishment, practitioners of corporal punishment, Institution where corporal punishment is practiced and reasons for corporal punishment.

Respondents of the Study

Respondents of the study were drawn from households, teachers, police, justice sector, civil society, local leaders, children and home care givers. Findings are shown in Figure 1.

Analysis in Figure 2 shows that there were more household interviews with parents (32%) followed by children (25%) and teachers (21%). The rest of the respondents included domestic workers (houseboys and girls) and the stakeholders in health sector, civil society, and local leaders each at 5%. Both the justice sector and the police contributed 1% of the respondent population. The implications of this type of sampling are that the results are biased to the respondent population. However, generalizations may be made with respect to the constituents of the specific categories who are assumed to be the mirror through which such respondents are viewed.

Perceptions and Practices of Corporal punishment

Debates for and against corporal punishment navigate around principles and practicalities of using it as a means of sustaining desirable behaviour. As noted by Alan et al. (2015), perpetrators of corporal punishment refer to it as spanking and not hitting or beating and find it satisfactory and an efficient form of punishment when culturally acceptable and less violent. This study sought to explore respondents’ perceptions, attitude and practices of corporal punishment in Rwanda.

Perceptions on use of Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is any presentation of repugnant stimulus to correct undesired behaviour, (Mabusa et al., 2015). Use of corporal punishment is likely to instil discipline and inculcate positive behaviour by stimulating fright and conveying information of impeding consequences of inappropriate performance, (Gershoff & Grogan, 2013). In this regard, respondents were asked to outline views on corporal punishment. Responses are shown in Figure 3.

According to findings in Figure 3, corporal punishment was perceived as punishment that can have impact (36%), child abuse (30%), and denial of child rights (28%). Other perceptions, which were minimal, included disciplining a child (2%), knocking a child’s head (2%) and pulling child’s ears (2%). By stating “punishment that can have impact” the respondents meant “feeling pain necessary for compliance and behaviour change”. This is in concurrence with Pontalti (2013) findings that in Rwanda, children received physical punishment in schools while parents kicked and punched them at home. From the onset, it is clear that there is an uneasy coexistence between the cultural or traditional understanding of corporal punishment (that can have impact) and the contemporary understanding of the practice (tendency for child abuse and denial of child rights).
Corporal punishment comprises of all forms of physical punishment ranging from; spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or forcing children to take unpleasant substances like soap, hot sauce or pepper. (UNICEF, 2011). Table 2 shows distribution of corporal punishment by district.

Findings in Table 2 indicate that the perception of corporal punishment as one that can have impact was
Table 2. Distribution and Practicalities of corporal punishment by District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Child abuse</th>
<th>Denial of child rights</th>
<th>Disciplining a child</th>
<th>Knocking their heads</th>
<th>Pulling their ears</th>
<th>Punishment that can have impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayonza</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusizi</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhanga</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gasabo</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huye</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30%</strong></td>
<td><strong>28%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>36%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings in Figure 3 show that (60%) of the respondents identified beating with chains/sticks kneeling down (20%) and pulling ears (10%) as the main methods of corporal punishment. This finding corroborates with Oganda and Pells (2015) who indicated that teachers use canning, slapping, kicking, scratching, and pulling hair in order to maintain discipline in schools. The other methods included slapping (with the hand) (4%), knocking the head (2%) and burning fingers (2%). Knocking the head and burning fingers were reported by the women and police in Huye and Muhanga. Although minimal, these two methods could be more excruciating, lead to gross violation of child rights and leave debilitating and longer term emotional and physical scars in children.

Forms of Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment, which is invariably humiliating, inflicts deliberate physical and emotional pain and distress as a result of undesired behavior among children. As noted by UNICEF (2011) corporal punishment may involve; pinching, kicking, scratching, burning, scalding, slapping or even wiping with wooden objects which leads to physical harm. Findings are presented in Figure 4 and Table 3.

highest in Muhanga district (18%) followed by Rusizi (14%). This is in agreement with Marcus (2014) observation that parents do not perceive corporal punishment as violation of child’s right but as part of rearing for correcting disruptive behaviour. Kayonza and Huye districts saw the practice more as child abuse (12%) and (10%) respectively. In Gasabo (14%) and Huye (10%) the corporal punishment was considered as denial of child rights. These are differences which suggest the type of advocacy activities suitable to improve perceptions on the practice among the community members and stakeholders in each of the districts.
findings are in tandem with Mendez, Durtschi, Nepl and Smith (2016) noted that spanking and bitting are the most forms of punishment practiced in schools and homes. The fact that the doctors reported this method so frequently/at such a high rate suggests the injurious consequences of this practice leads to medical attention. Notably, boys are more the victims of corporal punishment than girls both at home and in schools. The age at which corporal punishment is practiced also differs, with children within the range of 8-15 being most at risk while those below the mentioned age group are less affected. However, Oganga and Pells (2015) noted that children in middle childhood aged 5-9 years are increasingly exposed to violence with boys subjected to physical punishment and girls humiliated or subjected to sexual violence. Further, children above 15 years are capable of defending themselves from the physical abuse; they can run from the offender if given chance to escape. In homes, children are more physically abused by their relatives and/or house maids. This practice is more carried out in homes, at schools and at childcare institutions.

**Corporal punishment by immediate role models**

According to Oganda and Pells (2015), parents find corporal punishment as a means of discipline which is effective in dealing with domestic disobedience. Supporters of corporal punishment including teachers and parents acknowledge that it provides an immediate response to indiscipline which enables the learner to continue with learning unlike when suspended from school. In this regard, policy makers in schools employ corporal punishment for controlling learner behavior and achievement, class control, respect for teachers and for improving moral character development. This study explored the perpetrators of corporal punishment in five districts in Rwanda. Findings are presented in Figure 5.

Though the current draft of child protection, laws which prohibit corporal punishment, provides leeway to parents,
teachers, or children’s relatives to practice physical force in disciplining children. This study established that male parents (44%) followed by housemaids (16%) and female parents (14%) are among those who highly use corporal punishment with children. It is surprising that housemaids (16%) practice corporal punishment more than the female parents. In support of this finding, UNICEF (2014) indicated that care givers in homes engage in violent, cruel and punitive child discipline practices such as name calling, humiliation and yelling. This may suggest that the domestic workers have taken after the example of the male parents or that the female parents have encouraged them to use (or are not discouraging them from using) corporal punishment on children within the households. The findings could also mean that female parents have abandoned the responsibility of child discipline to the male parents and housemaids and that they are spending less time with children. Further findings shows that that children living with a step mother are likely to experience the use of corporal punishment (4%).

Institutions Practicing Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment in most countries is practiced in homes and learning institution where rights of children are violated and abused. Teachers use corporal punishment in schools for obedience, prevention of undesirable behaviour and managing discipline Marcus (2014) while parents use it to demand obedience in homes. The study examined institutions where corporal punishment is rampant. Results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that 48% of corporal punishment occurred in schools while 40% took place in homes. Corporal punishment is lawful in the home and parents have a right of correction under Article 347 of Law No. 42 while children have limited protection from violence and abuse under the Penal Code and Law No. 27 (concerning the rights of the child and protection of children against violence). There is no explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools. This confirms the study findings of Oganda and Pell (2015) that corporal punishment is widely used in schools and homes. Majority of the police officers felt it was used more in schools. However no respondents in Kayonza, Rusizi and Muhanga Districts expected its use in the police stations. The children and housemaids indicated it was used more in homes and not schools or police stations.

CONCLUSION

Rwanda is evidently on the path to expressly abolish all forms of corporal punishment. However, this process is
married by the entrenched traditional belief among parents and teachers (who form a significant portion of role models) that corporal punishment still holds a place in punishing, disciplining as well as educating their children, hence being a pre requisite to change inappropriate behaviours or cause children to comply with societal norms. Teachers and parents think that although non violent measures do not cause any negative impact to children’s behaviour, they fail to teach a child to change any bad behaviour. Advocates of corporal punishment explicitly state that discipline leads to improved outcomes among children. This is a reflection of the challenges that the ratified conventions on rights of the Child and the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child face in Rwanda.

Such beliefs are held by policy makers and implementers and it remains to be seen how fast the voice or change will affect and overcome these beliefs and establish a “corporal-punishment-free” Rwanda. It is however encouraging that opportunity for effective advocacy exists as shown through those who expressly reported that there are negative impacts of corporal punishment such as the development of social disorders. Even among those who advocate for corporal punishment a sizeable proportion admit that there are negative consequences of the practice and suggest some change. These are opportunities to be exploited through focused, thematic and spirited advocacy, research and training.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Policy:** Rwandan Legislation does not include an explicit prohibition of corporal punishment. The Government of Rwanda should introduce legislation that comprehensively prohibits all forms of corporal punishment including the so-called ‘right to correction’ in the Civil Code. In addition, Rwanda should repeal all provisions that authorize corporal punishment and provide for care, recovery, non-violent and nurturing parenting styles for enhancing positive behaviour among children.

**Practice:** Teachers and parents acknowledge that corporal punishment provides an immediate response to indiscepline which enables the learner to continue with learning unlike when suspended from school. In this regard, there is need for schools to provide supportive learning environments, for reinforcing appropriate behavior and empowering learners to be creative, make decision and develop self-discipline. There is a need for campaigns to sensitize communities, parents and care givers on the harmful effects of corporal punishment and to educate on positive forms of discipline which guide and support children.

**Further Research:** Corporal punishment which is invariably humiliating inflicts deliberate physical and emotional pain and distress as a result of undesired behavior among children. Hence, there is need for further research to sensitize communities on harmful effects of corporal punishment.

**Conflict of interests**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

**REFERENCES**


Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). General Comment No. 8. The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment. (arts.19;28; para, 2; and 37, inter alia).


Working towards universal prohibition of corporal punishment (2018). A special report for the high level global conference held by H.E. the President of Malta, May-June