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Corporal punishment in South African schools: a neglected explanation for its persistence

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The South African education system historically has used corporal punishment to maintain discipline. Criticism of its effects led, in 1996, to the banning of this form of punishment. But this legislative intervention did not end the use of corporal punishment in schools. This article offers an explanation for the ongoing use of corporal punishment. It is based on a survey of 16 Durban schools in September and October 1998. Corporal punishment has effectively disappeared from middle-class, formerly white, schools, but is still relatively common in township schools. Reasons for the persistent and illegal use of corporal punishment include the absence of alternatives, the legacy of authoritarian education practices and the belief that corporal punishment is necessary for orderly education to take place. A neglected explanation is that corporal punishment persists because parents use it in the home and support its use in school. There is a tension between the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools and the increase in parent involvement in the affairs of schools.

Introduction

Why does corporal punishment persist in schools when law has specifically prohibited it? This is the problem that this article addresses. An answer is offered by first examining the history of corporal punishment in South Africa and recent educational policy interventions. Secondly, local definitions and understandings are explored to show that there is no unanimity amongst educators, parents and learners regarding corporal punishment. In the third section, the role of parents is considered. The fourth section describes the methodology and results of a survey conducted in 16 Durban secondary schools. The final section focuses specifically on the practices of discipline and punishment at home as reported by learners. These findings suggest that parents continue to use corporal punishment in the home and believe that it should be used at school. It is argued that domestic modes of discipline play a significant role in sustaining the practice of corporal punishment in schools.

History and current context

Corporal punishment was an integral part of schooling for most teachers and students in twentieth century South African schools. It was used excessively in white, single-sex boys schools and liberally in all other schools except in single-sex girls schools where its use was limited (Morrell, 1994). The introduction of Bantu Education in 1955 exposed black children who had hitherto largely been outside the education system to school beatings. Unlike white girls, African girls were not exempted from beatings.

The effects of corporal punishment were hotly debated in the 1970s and 1980s (Newell, 1972). Psychologists argued that it did serious emotional damage, affected the self-esteem of learners and impacted adversely on academic performance (Cherian, 1990; Holdstock, 1990; Murray, 1985). Respectful relations between teachers and students were not possible, they argued, in a context where corporal punishment was used. Social commentators pointed out that corporal punishment was part of a wider web of violence that fueled antagonisms and hatred (Kenway

& Fitzclarence, 1997). Teachers responded by arguing that without it, discipline could not be maintained. Critics responded that corporal punishment seldom reformed wrong-doers and had no educative potential.

The ending of apartheid and the establishment of a human rights culture in the 1990s laid the foundation for the ending of corporal punishment. Taking a lead from legal precedents in the European Union (Pete, 1994; Maree, 1995; Parker-Jenkins, 1999), South Africa's law courts held corporal punishment to be an infringement of a person's human rights. Section 10 of the South African Schools Act (1996) reflected this finding by banning corporal punishment in schools.

Since 1996 newspapers have routinely reported that corporal punishment continues to be used in schools, sometimes resulting in hospitalisation. In rare cases, teachers have been charged in terms of the Act, but few have received more than a rap over the knuckles. Throughout the education system there has been an apparent reluctance to prosecute teachers and it was only late in 2000 that the national Department of Education moved beyond public condemnation of teachers who continued to use corporal punishment to elaborate alternatives (Department of Education, 2000a).

Official ambivalence about the continuing use of corporal punishment can be explained by referring to a number of features of the emerging, unified education system. Corporal punishment was much used and favoured by teachers. Many felt it to be indispensable to their work. The transformation of the education system — for example, trying to equalize the number of teachers working in public schools and trying to introduce a curricular (outcomes-based) alternative to Christian National and Bantu Education — pushed the issue of corporal punishment down the agenda. Confused, over-worked and under-qualified teachers were unlikely voluntarily to give up corporal punishment when they considered it their only means of keeping order in class. And effective alternatives were not initially introduced (Vally, 1999). Teacher resolve to continue using corporal punishment was strengthened by assertive and rebellious students who challenged traditional concepts of classroom authority. KwaZulu-Natal's minister of Education, Dr Vincent Zulu: described the situation in the following words: "We cannot deny that in many schools in South Africa, structures of control are virtually non-existent, and the teacher, the erstwhile figure of authority, has become ineffectual in the wake of the learner's militancy" (Daily News, 18 April 1997). Discipline continues to be considered a major problem by teachers and students alike (Mabebe & Prinsloo, 2000).

At the policy level, government attempted to fill the vacuum left by the banning of corporal punishment in two ways. It introduced school-level codes of conduct and gave parents an unprecedented involvement in school affairs. Both were in line with consensual democratic ideas about school governance. The new approach involved a different philosophy towards punishment — one that stressed consensus, non-violence, negotiation and the development of school communities. School Governing Bodies (SGBs) were constituted as a major vehicle for the democratic transformation of schools. Parents constitutionally comprise the majority of SGB members. SGBs are not involved in the

day-to-day running of schools but they have a key role to play in policy, including the development of a code of conduct. Parents thus can play an important, indeed critical, role in school disciplinary policy. As I shall discuss below, the desire to democratise school governance introduced new voices into decision-making that did not necessarily echo the views of national policy makers about what constituted appropriate punishment in schools.

Corporal punishment — definitions and debates

Corporal punishment is "physical punishment as distinguished from pecuniary punishment or a fine; any kind of punishment or inflicted on the body" or "the infliction of pain by a teacher or other educational official upon the body of the student as a penalty for doing something which has been disapproved of by the punisher" (Maree, 1995:68).

The constitutional status of corporal punishment was considered and changed in the landmark ruling by the constitutional court in the 1995 case of the State v Henry Williams and five others. The court held that the "deliberate infliction of physical pain on the person of the accused, offends society's notions of decency and is a direct invasion of the right which every person has to human dignity" (De Kock, 1996:18).

The above ruling had major implications for educational debates on the issue. The poles of the argument are represented by the following two quotes:

"Corporal punishment must be seen in a positive light seeing it helps the one being educated to realise his potentialities. The educator must accept that the child is born with a tendency to evil ... Corporal punishment can help the child to learn the right way and fear that is necessary for the forming of a conscience." (JHB Potgieter, 1984, quoted in Gluckman, 1985:10).

Holdstock, on the other hand, claimed that

"hitting someone else, especially someone younger, smaller, and utterly defenceless, constitutes a violent act. This is true even in those instances where people claim that they cane 'in love'" (Holdstock, 1990:342).

The rulings of law courts have not ended debates about corporal punishment nor its practice. One of the reasons is that despite legal clarity about what constitutes corporal punishment, teachers, educators, parents and lay people in general and even state officials do not necessarily have the same understanding. For example, when the Durban child protection unit investigates corporal punishment in schools, it focuses on physical hurt (Natal Mercury, 11 November 1998). The legal issue of impairment of dignity is ignored. In the same vein, teachers and parents commonly distinguish between assault and beating — the former leading to physical injury, the latter not. In primary school in Kwazulu-Natal a parent commented on a case of corporal punishment where her seven year old daughter's arm was broken during a beating: "How could a teacher do that to a seven year old child. I do not have a problem with corporal punishment but what this teacher did was unforgivable" (Sunday Tribune, 12 July 1998).

An additional complication is the motive for corporal punishment. When it is given in a situation of mutual trust it is regarded as acceptable. In one of the schools visited (a township school which drew its students from a very poor area), an excellent atmosphere prevailed. Students were in class and attentive. This was in sharp contrast to other township schools. In asking how this healthy learning environment had been created the male principal and a senior female teacher both confirmed two key points: Parents were readily consulted and punishment (including beatings) was 'lovingly' given. This is a widely held view among teachers as well (see Independent on Saturday, 29 May 1999).

Many believe that corporal punishment administered justly ('with love') is necessary and right. And this is not peculiar to South Africa. A study in Australian schools found that young male aboriginal learners considered punishment to be "acceptable if it was fair and if warning was given" (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998:155). In short, many teachers do not agree that all beatings constitute corporal punishment and

most do not believe that corporal punishment is undesirable (Deacon, Morrell & Prinsloo, 1999; Mkhize, 2000).

Equally, however, many teachers condemn uncontrolled, malicious and cruel beatings. Recent reports have found that teachers do not condone a variety of types of physical punishment. Throwing books or chalk at children, pulling hair or ears and pinching were found in a 1997 HSRC report to be unacceptable. Similarly, most teachers found it unacceptable to belittle or humiliate a child (Cape Argus, 26 June 1997).

Examining corporal punishment from an historical perspective does not simplify matters. It has not been experienced equally by all — race, gender and to a lesser extent class have all had an impact. Yet, for the most part, beatings have been stoically borne and tacitly accepted by students. Only in the 1970s and 1980s was this form of punishment widely challenged. In the national climate of opposition to apartheid and authoritarianism, black students demanded an end to corporal punishment (De Villiers; 1990; SAIRR, 1981:505). But this response was certainly not universal. A lack of research in the area prevents generalisation, but a study conducted in Botswana probably reflects the situation in many South African schools. This study found that there was support amongst students for this form of punishment (Mphele, 1997). A possible reason was the terror of humiliation — being made to look a fool by being publicly scolded is in many contexts considered to be much worse than a beating. Boys have a "a heightened sensitivity to shaming" (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998:155).

For many teachers corporal punishment remains a disciplinary option. Part of the reason is that teachers feel helpless in the face of school violence (from within and outside the school). Martin Schön-teich (1999) reports that:

The police services have not been able to prevent murder, rape, gang invasions, assaults and levels of successful prosecution of suspects are very low. While the average criminal whose actions were reported to the police stood a one in four chance of being prosecuted in 1949, his odds improved to one in ten in 1996. The same criminal stood a one in five chance of being convicted in 1949. In 1996, his chance of being found guilty by a court had dropped to almost one in thirteen. (Schön-teich, 1999:2).

For some serious violent crimes, the chances of being arrested, prosecuted and successfully convicted are as low as 1 in 50 (Schön-teich, 1999:1). Teachers are therefore often expected to act as law enforcers. They are also required to act as counsellors and mediators (to assist victims of violence and deal with situations that are threatening to turn ugly). Most schools no longer employ psychologists. In short, teachers are expected to handle more teaching, more administration, larger classes as well as cope with factors beyond their control. Little wonder that the easy expedient of corporal punishment is still used. It can be viewed as a way of expressing autonomy, of controlling a situation that feels chaotic. A High School principal in Daveyton, lamenting the prohibition of corporal punishment, set out a position frequently stated by teachers.

"The government castrated teachers by taking away their powers to use corporal punishment. Ill-discipline is the main source of our troubles and unless that is corrected there will be little improvement." (Sunday Times, 13 October 1996).

Pronouncements from government have not been unambiguous either. KwaZulu-Natal's former provincial minister of education, Eileen Nkosi-Shandu, for example, publicly called for the restoration of 'the old fashioned culture' and the return of corporal punishment (Sunday Tribune, 7 February 1999). In addition various newspapers quite frequently report and comment on corporal punishment as a legitimate response to rising levels of crime and a perceived lack of order in schools and society more generally (Natal Bureau, 1995).

Government policy also contains curious anomalies. Take the 'safe schools' initiative, for example (Mlamleli, Mabelane, Napo, Sibiyi & Free, 2000). This laudable initiative (part of the Department of Education's Tirisano campaign) is designed to free schools from 'sex-based and gender-based violence'. Yet corporal punishment

(which has a strong gender component (Morrell, 2001)) is not included within the ambit of the initiative. Gender-based violence has become synonymous with sexual harassment. This is unfortunate because it suggests that corporal punishment does not actually threaten the safety of learners. There is much evidence to suggest that it does.

Parents, schools and discipline

The democratic transformation of schooling has envisaged a key role for parents. Towards this end, the role of parents has been formalised via the introduction of School Governing Bodies. Arguments used to motivate this position have been drawn, in part, from British debates where it was argued that "parents should be given a greater role in education to ensure that schools are more effective. They too believe that parents will push for better standards for their children if they are more formally involved" (David, 1993:3). Policy makers, researchers and, to a lesser extent, practitioners, argued further that parental involvement would reduce home-school dissonance — a factor held to disadvantage, particularly working class, children (David, 1993: 159-160). This position, developed in the 1980s, gradually matured into formalised arrangements of school-parent partnerships though in the process the goals were contested and shifted from being directed at reducing disparate socio-economic educational outcomes to ensuring 'more efficient schools' and better academic performance.

Parents in South Africa historically have been involved in school affairs. Their impact, particularly in white middle-class schools, remains significant and is visible in the physical resources and academic output of these schools to this day. One of the reasons for concerted state attempt to involve the parents of black township learners is to equalize the state of affairs. It is recognised, for example, that parental involvement does have advantages particularly in campaign-specific ventures (e.g. against drug-taking) (Mashishi, 1994). Yet parental involvement has tended to be regarded for its benefits (resource maximization and developing a culture of learning, for example (Pampallis, 1998)) while the difficulties standing in the way of these worthy goals are frequently ignored.

In the area of school discipline, parents have often had to assert themselves to make an impact. Parker-Jenkins shows how, in the UK, parents took educational authorities to court in order to protect their children from corporal punishment and in this way gained for parents more widely, the right to be involved in school discipline issues (Parker-Jenkins, 1999). In South Africa parental involvement concerning corporal punishment has pursued two diametrically opposed goals. In the 1980s a grouping of parents, teachers and students created an organisation, Education Without Fear, to campaign for the end of corporal punishment. In the late 1990s, now in a country where corporal punishment was illegal, some parents and teachers have, through Christian Education South Africa (CESA), challenged the banning, claiming that their parental (and constitutional) right to give 'biblical correction' is being infringed thereby (see Pete & Du Plessis, 1999). Although they lost their court battle this legal challenge suggests a complex situation and the existence of a strong body of opinion in support of corporal punishment.

South African policy documents assert rather than explain why the involvement of parents is vital in order to "correct past injustices by promoting education for all." (Department of Education, Northern Cape, 1997:1). For example, it is claimed that "Without the active involvement of all stakeholders in education the vision of quality education cannot be realised." (Department of Education, Northern Cape, 1997: 3) The position of parents as stakeholders is spelled out: "Parents, learners, teachers and members of the school community will be part of transforming education in their schools and have an important role to play" (Department of Education, Northern Cape, 1997:2).

In an official 1999 Gauteng Department of Education report it is baldly stated that "[t]he SGB is expected to take the initiative in formulating school policies such as language policy, admission policy, code of conduct for students," and so on (Department of Education, Gauteng, 1999:14). In a Department of Education booklet (2000b:7),

parents are informed that they have the 'responsibility' to assist with the discipline of their children. The directorial, one could almost say coercive, tone of policy documents suggests why there remains a disjuncture between parental views and school practices (see Squelch, 1998). The role of parents in school affairs has been determined from above and there are few mechanisms available to feed dissonant ideas from parents into school policy and practice. Not surprisingly therefore, SGBs have been most effective in middle-class schools where parents are skilled and well-organised. In some cases, in a rural special needs school in KwaZulu-Natal, for example, even where parental involvement has been encouraged, the results have been limited (Ngwenya, 1996).

There are two problematical assumptions which plague parental involvement. The one is that the category 'parent' is obvious and that the people who are parents will be able to assist. The second is that teachers and parents will work harmoniously together.

In the first instance, a great many children live with guardians who are not their 'parents' in a biological sense. This does not necessarily doom the project of parental involvement, but when one factors in the increase in female single-headed households and the effect of AIDS on family forms (including the increasing variation in the type of person who might be a guardian — sibling, extended family members, neighbours) and the capacity of such guardians to involve themselves in school affairs when they are involved in caring for desperately ill people, one begins to get a sense of the difficulties. Literature in the British context shows how untested assumptions about the parent impacted heavily and adversely on women who more frequently are the parents who involve themselves in school affairs (David, 1998:258). Those particularly disadvantaged were single mothers in minority (black) communities who were now required to involve themselves in school issues in addition to their many other taxing commitments (David, 1993). The same appears to be true in South Africa (Mkhize, 2000).

In the second instance, it is frequently the case that teachers and parents do not see eye to eye. In the British context, for example, teachers under pressure from a range of quarters sometimes have defended their professionalism "by erecting barriers between themselves and parents" (Todd and Higgins, 1998:235). Furthermore, a recent study of Scottish schools found that most teachers felt that disruptive behaviour in school originated in the home, and therefore was not within their power to control (Maxwell, 1987). In terms of these perceptions, discipline is something parents should deal with. In South Africa there are indications of similar difficulties. In an exchange of reader viewpoints in *The Teacher* in November 1998 a writer offered the following opinion.

The question that his letter raises is what are parents doing to discipline their children? There was a time when the teacher could act in place of the parent in order to provide moral and intellectual guidance to the pupil. Not any more. It seems that some of our parents need disciplining themselves. Apart from taking firm action against errant and unproductive teachers, the state must take action against parents who do not monitor the school attendance of their children. (Mail and Guardian Home Page: *The Teacher*, November 1998 (www.teacher.co.za), <http://www.teacher.co.za/9811/letters.htm>, 7]

We now get to the main point of this study — which is to consider the involvement of parents in the issue of corporal punishment. Historical and comparative studies suggest that parents often have used corporal punishment to 'keep discipline' in the home. A study in the United States, where corporal punishment in schools has long been banned, shows, for example, that many parents still liberally use corporal punishment and believe that it is necessary for good order (Strauss, 1994). While there is no similar parallel study for South Africa, evidence suggests that corporal punishment is also widely used by parents in this country (Holdstock, 1990). In fact, corporal punishment is common in many families where it is part of a complex where violence is often the 'first-line tactic' in resolving conflict (Wood &

Jewkes, 2001:331).

Many South African autobiographies refer to the liberal use of corporal punishment in homes by parents and other guardians. Such punishment seems to have been more prevalent in African homes (Connock, 1975:37-8; Magona, 1990:24-5). Since most African parents themselves received strong corporal punishment as children from their own parents, there is a tendency to continue with this type of disciplining (Mposula, 2000:4). And it is a short step from the use of corporal punishment at home to the use of it in schools. Indeed, a study in Botswana found that many parents asked for its use in school. One mother "believes that schooling reinforces teaching respect for adult authority. She believes that teachers should have the right to beat children ... it makes children listen and respect the teacher" (Fuller, Singer & Keiley, 1999: 316).

There are studies which show that harsh corporal punishment by parents on their children adversely affects academic performance and produces low self-esteem and anti-social behaviours (Cherian, 1990; Miller, 1987). Yet we know little about what parents think of corporal punishment. There have been celebrated cases in which parents have opposed corporal punishment in court. Yet there seems to be a tacit acceptance on the part of the majority of parents that corporal punishment is necessary for 'discipline'. An HSRC report on school discipline found that most teachers equated discipline with corporal punishment and believed that "it was basically the responsibility of the parents to teach children obedience responsibility, respect for others, self-control and discipline" (Cape Argus, 26 June 1997). Similarly a national survey of women over 18 years old found that most favoured the return of corporal punishment (Sunday Times, 2 November 1996). Of course many of the respondents would not have been parents and the gender issue is not incidental, but it does suggest that adult women who are beyond the school system favour corporal punishment.

Some of the punishment dished out by parents to their own children is criminal, particularly when it produces physical harm. In a recent Pietermaritzburg case, a father was given a two year suspended jail sentence for hitting his six year old son. The case highlighted the unclear line between assault and punishment. A spokesperson for the SAPS child protection unit said that although the line was very thin dividing what the law called assault and what parents saw as appropriate punishment, parents should be very careful when they disciplined children.

"Parents could land themselves in serious trouble and embarrassment if they are not careful in they (sic) way they discipline their children. Parents must punish their children with love and care" (Saturday Argus, 12 April 1997).

The research project in Durban secondary schools

In late 1998 I conducted a survey in 16 Durban high schools. The purpose of the survey was to investigate issues of school discipline in a context in which corporal punishment had recently been prohibited. By the time the research was conducted corporal punishment had officially been banned for over 18 months. Reports in the press and discussions with teachers in the Durban region suggested that discipline was 'a problem' and that corporal punishment was still being used. The issue seemed most problematic in secondary schools particularly amongst older learners, many of whom consider themselves to be young adults and who are, in terms of UNESCO definitions, no longer children because they are over 18 years of age. It was not possible to survey the Grade 12 classes as matric exams were imminent, therefore Grade 11 learners were selected.

In order to get a rounded sense of developments and capture the diversity of schooling conditions and experiences, a purposive sample was used. A variety of factors determined the size and composition of the sample: gaining access to schools and the necessity of going through official channels in order to do so as well as limited time and resources. The Regional Chief Directors of Durban North and Durban South each provided a list of eight schools. In each list there were two former House of Assembly (Model C) schools (one single-sex and one

co-educational), one school from each of the former Houses of Representatives and Delegates, and four schools from the former Department of Education or Department of Education and Culture, KwaZulu-Natal.

The research was sensitive because respondents were potentially being asked to testify about the occurrence of illegal acts (corporal punishment). For this reason the questionnaire was selected as the main research instrument. 750 questionnaires (an average of 47 per school) were distributed and completed.

A number of research questions informed the construction of the questionnaire. These included: what kinds of discipline are currently used in schools?; have there been any changes in disciplinary practices over the last three years?; which forms of discipline are considered the most effective?; how do learners respond to different types of disciplinary practice? The final research question was: what are the connections between domestic and school discipline?

As indicated, the main data-gathering instrument was the questionnaire. It was divided into four sections and contained 44 questions. The first section was devoted to biographical data, the second to practices of school discipline, the third to learner perceptions of/attitudes towards school disciplinary practices and the final section to discipline at home. The questions were both closed and open-ended. The findings reported in the last section of this article are drawn mainly from the first and last sections of the questionnaire.

Time constraints and language ability impacted on responses. In a few cases, questions in the last section were not completed because time ran out and learners were required to attend classes elsewhere. Zulu first-language speakers were assisted by teachers and the research assistant, but nevertheless, some did not clearly understand some of the questions and gave contradictory responses. Only valid responses were selected for analysis.

The distribution of questionnaires and conducting of interviews was undertaken by the author (a white male) and a Zulu-speaking research assistant, Bongani Sithole. Sithole's familiarity with the schools (he was both a learner and teacher in the schools of this region) and his linguistic ability were essential to the research process as he was often required to translate from Zulu into English and to explain aspects of the questionnaire.

The data were analysed using SPSS for windows. For some variables percentages in the graphs presented in this article may add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were requested. Where significant associations are noted these were established using the Chi-square statistic at a confidence level of 0.05 or less.

In addition to the distribution of questionnaires, group interviews were conducted where possible. The pressure of school timetables and a tight research schedule resulted in such interviews being conducted in only ten schools. The sensitivity of the subject was acknowledged and the interviews were not tape-recorded in order to ensure anonymity. In addition, where possible, interviews with principals and senior teachers were held.

The study was sensitive to race, class and gender. Given the legacy of apartheid education, race is an obvious category of analysis on which to focus, but changes in the last fifteen years have rendered the analytical use of 'race' more complex. In the 1980s one could still use 'race' synonymously with class, which is to say that black children were generally in poorly resourced schools learning under conditions designed in terms of Bantu Education logic for working lives as herders of wood and drawers of water. While the gap between former white middle class schools and black, township, working class schools remains, one can no longer use race as an automatic marker of educational location and disadvantage. In KwaZulu-Natal, schools began to desegregate from 1986. In that year, House of Delegates (Indian) schools began admitting African students, thus setting a trend which saw the breakdown of mandatory, racially segregated schooling. By the end of 1995 there were approximately 200 000 African students nationally in Coloured, Indian and White schools (Naidoo, 1996:9). The number has in all likelihood increased substantially, but it is no

longer possible to know the extent as government departments have stopped keeping racially disaggregated figures (pers. comm., Monica Bot, 28 April 1998).

It is important to recognise that, despite desegregation, race remains salient. There is still a large gap (measured in terms of facilities, academic results, school ethos) between former (white) Model C (suburban, middle class) schools and township schools which continue to be the mainstay of education provision for Africans in Durban and the rest of the country. In attempting to make sense of this phenomenon which is essentially a class phenomenon, this study analysed the results in terms of type of school, as well as in terms of race. Virtually all learners (97% of the sample) in township schools were African. 22% of African learners in the sample were, however, studying in former (middle class) House of Assembly, Delegates and Representatives schools.

The salience given to type of school in this analysis as a way of making sense of race and class factors, should not conceal the fact that there are great varieties in each category. Amongst township schools the 1997 matric pass rate varied from a disastrous 2% to 100% and school fees ranged from R80 to R475 per annum. Facilities in township schools on the whole were poor with the exception of one that was well supplied and provisioned primarily as a result of outside funding. White (former Model C) schools had better facilities and staff:student ratios than former Coloured and Indian schools and they charged much higher fees: R 2300 to R4600 a year compared to R400 to R500 charged in former House of Delegates and Representatives schools.

Results

60.3% of the sample were African, 13.6% white, 13.5% Indian, and 12.6% coloured. The figures for KwaZulu-Natal as a whole are difficult to come by, but in 1995 the percentages (for the entire school going population) were 84% African, 4.5% white, 10% Indian, and 1.5% coloured (Strauss, van der Linde, Plekker & Strauss, 1995:2).¹ The gender profile of the sample was 45% male and 55% female. This accords closely with the profile of the Grade 11 class provincially. In 1997, there were 155 573 students in Grade 11 of whom 45.44% were male (Strauss, van der Linde, Plekker & Strauss, 1997:4).

Just over 50% of the respondents reported a change in school discipline over the last three years. 80% of white learners reported change compared to 47%, 49%, and 62% of coloured, African, and Indian students, respectively. Most of those who reported change noted that there was now less caning and a concomitant increase in other types of punishment such as detention. Corporal punishment remains widespread, particularly in township schools and is thus experienced disproportionately by African learners. Nevertheless, there have been notable changes: it is now used less frequently, with greater restraint and via more consultative processes.

The schools that have responded most readily to the prohibition have been the former white schools which appear to have ended corporal punishment (caning) altogether. In the former white, single-sex girls' school included in the sample, most respondents said there had been no change because corporal punishment was never used in that school.

Most students who commented on the changes (if they perceived any) were positive about developments. There were three ways in which they saw an improvement. Firstly, some noted that the extent and severity of punishment had declined. A female African learner aged 17–19 years noted: "(in the) last three years was allowed to be beaten you more than 7 times but student's complain now it is only allowed

2 times no more than that". Another African, female, 14–16 years, commented: "In 1995 and 1996 punishment were very high and but know the institution give us the right if the teacher punish student 5 stroke that is a wrong thing. Teacher will punish students 2 stroke only." Some students noted that corporal punishment had ended altogether: A female coloured learner, 17–19 years old stated: "Teachers have stopped hitting us with sticks and other objects like chalk dusts". A third kind of response noted a move to different methods of punishment. An African, male learner, 17–19 years: "Before we use to be beaten, but now other methods of disciplining are used such as being shouted at and discussing the issue with the teacher". Another learner, an African female, 20 years or over wrote: "Because the institution came up with new policies for learners to be able to share their own views and negotiate whatever problems they have and say whatever they want to say" (translation from Zulu).

Surprisingly, not everyone has welcomed the move away from corporal punishment. Boys attending the elite, single-sex, formerly white, rugby and cricket playing school criticized the end of beating. Historically being able to endure a beating affirmed the masculinity of a boy and contributed to the tough, masculinist ethos of the school (Morrell, 1994). A white, 17–19 year old commented: "Discipline has dropped remarkably since caning was done away with." A coloured colleague of the same age had a similar view: "Less harsher (now). I think that 'flogging' should be implemented again (much more effective). People are given easier punishment, like writing out lines etc."

Some African girls in township schools also mourned the ending of corporal punishment presumably because it had acted as a deterrent against aggressive behaviour from male peers. The end of corporal punishment has been perceived as the end of the capacity of a school to exert its authority and in some schools has consequently been associated with an increasing disregard for the rights of others. One 17–19 year old wrote: "Detention is now not that strong and since boys are not beaten the school is worse".

With the exception of Indian and white females, most groups, but especially African and white males and African females, continue to regard beating as the most effective punishment. 47.5% of all African learners ranked beating as the most effective punishment compared to 12.2% of Indian, 14.9% of coloured, and 17.8% of white learners. Two main reasons were cited by respondents: the teacher knows best and to learn about what is right and wrong, one has to suffer.

A highly significant counter finding, however, was generated in response to the question asking about emotional responses to being beaten, and being involved in more consultative forms of discipline. A huge majority of students felt anger, hurt, sadness and being wronged in relation to corporal punishment. By contrast, very positive feelings were expressed about consultative mechanisms of discipline, for example, discussing problems with the teacher or class.

Few South African schools have experimented with consultative forms of discipline in the wake of the banning of corporal punishment. Most have replaced corporal punishment with punitive measures like detention, kneeling for long periods, silence and writing lines. Yet where (for example in a girls only, middle class school) such mechanisms have been in place for some time, the response by students is exceedingly positive.

Two white learners (aged 17–19 years) from this school explained the position. "This is a mature and reasonable approach to punishment and allows for negotiation and an understanding of the reason of punishment as the views of both parties are expressed." Another wrote, "Talking instead of being reprimanded constantly helps therefore kids think we can communicate with one another and it doesn't degrade us/ lower our self esteem and pride. Abuse never gets people anywhere."

These positive responses read in conjunction with the findings that students have negative feelings in relation to corporal punishment provide hope that more progressive discourses will in time displace authoritarian modes. The role of parents in promoting or resisting these incipient shifts will be critical.

¹ In high school, higher drop out rates amongst Africans in the early schooling years would mean that the percentages would differ substantially. White enrolment as a percentage of the whole would be higher and African enrolment would be lower.

Discipline and punishment in the home

A second part of the study questioned learners about the role of their parents in domestic patterns of punishment and discipline. It was found that corporal punishment was still frequently used at home. (See Figure 1.)

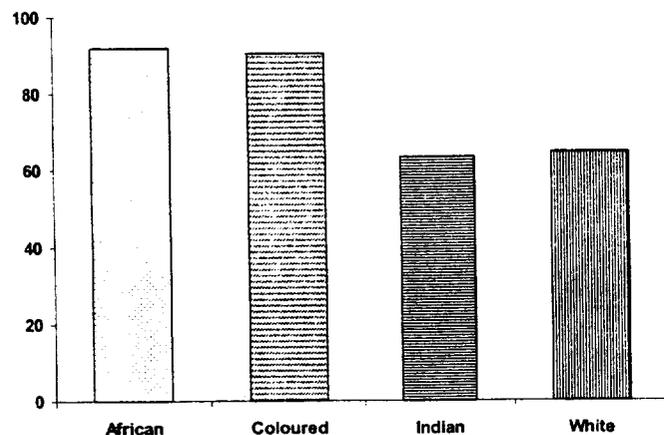


Figure 1 Percentage of learners ever beaten (by population group) (n = 748)

This finding suggests that the support for beating in school as 'the most effective' punishment reflects domestic patterns of discipline. Children are taught at home to know the difference between right and wrong, to be respectful. The way in which this is done influences attitudes amongst learners towards corporal punishment. Where corporal punishment is frequently used domestically it is likely to be accepted in a school context by those receiving it at home.

48% of African learners indicated that it was the most common method of discipline at home compared to 16.7%, 16.5%, and 9.0% for coloured, white and Indian learners, respectively. This is a major difference. There is a slight gender bias when it comes to being beaten at home — 38% of boys and 29% of girls reported that it was the most common discipline used at home, but this is striking all the same because in other international contexts, the difference is very marked. (See Figure 2.)

White children receive their first beating earlier than other groups (Figure 3), but African children identify corporal punishment as the most common type of domestic punishment (Figure 4). African learners were beaten with a stick more than any other children (Figure 5). Along with coloured children, African children were also exposed to much longer duration of parental beatings — 15% and 16%, respectively, were still being beaten by their parents in Grade 11 (Figure 6).

The result is that of the 136 respondents who reported injuries as a result of corporal punishment, virtually all (bar 3 Indian) were African and coloured (Figure 7).

These results allow us to make broad generalisations about the profile of corporal punishment in homes. Most white children are beaten at an early age, but mostly with the hand. The frequency of punishment declines with age and stops some time before age 16.

African children are exposed to corporal punishment at a slightly older age, but it is more severe and frequent and continues into early adulthood. Indian children are beaten later than other children and less severely and frequently though in some exceptional cases severe injury results. Coloured children have a profile in relation to corporal punishment which is very similar to that of African children except insofar as gender is concerned. Coloured girls are beaten less frequently than coloured boys. Boys are beaten more severely. As one African boy put it,

"Girls are not really the same as boys and their way of being

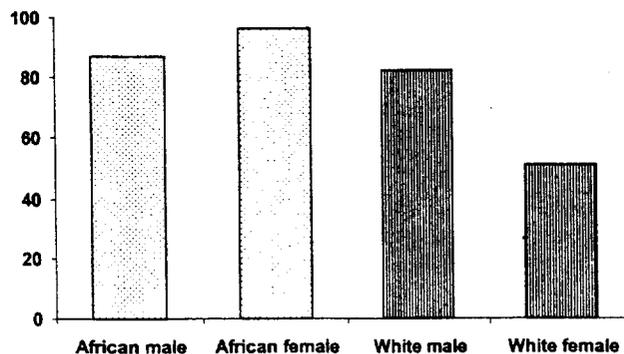


Figure 2 Percentage of learners ever beaten by gender and population group (n = 553)

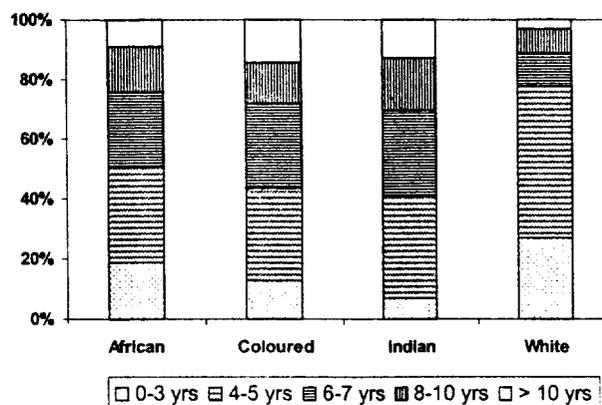


Figure 3 Age at first beating by population group (n = 598)

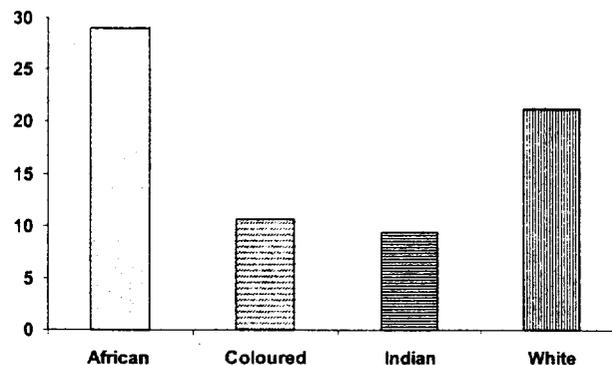


Figure 4 Percentage of learners ranking beating as most common form of discipline (n = 629)

brought up is not the same so girls get a different discipline than the boys ... if maybe you discipline a boy by using a sjambok then you should use a stick or a belt for a girl" (translated from Zulu).

The weight of punishment in the home can also be assessed by the fact that 71.6% of African learners reported being punished at least twice a day (this does not necessarily refer to being beaten twice a day) compared to 17.6%, 6.8%, and 4.1% for coloured, Indian and white learners, respectively. This impression is strengthened by the reportage of injury as a result of household discipline: 27.2% and 24.4% of African and coloured learners, respectively, reported injury compared to only 8.7% and 7.6% amongst Indian and white learners. In short, strict discipline in African homes in which corporal punishment fea-

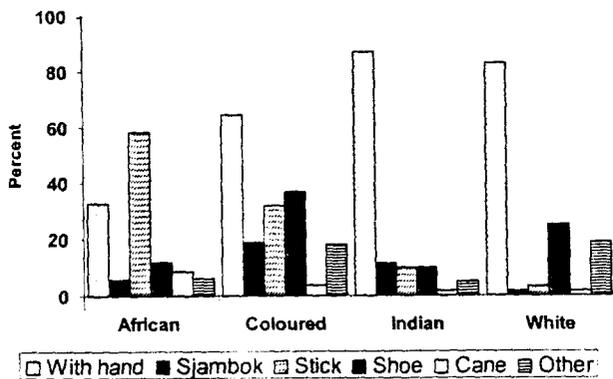


Figure 5 How were you beaten? (N = 608)

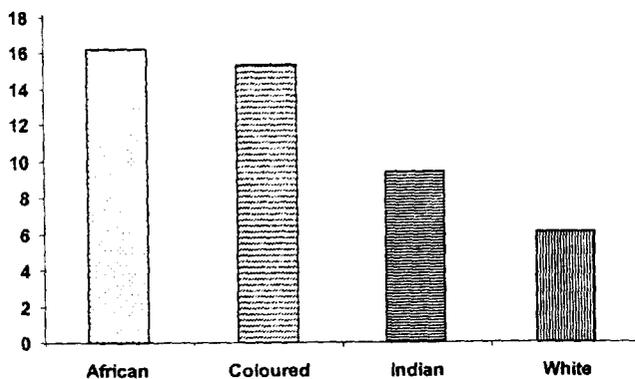


Figure 6 Percentage of learners still disciplined by parents using beating (n = 629)

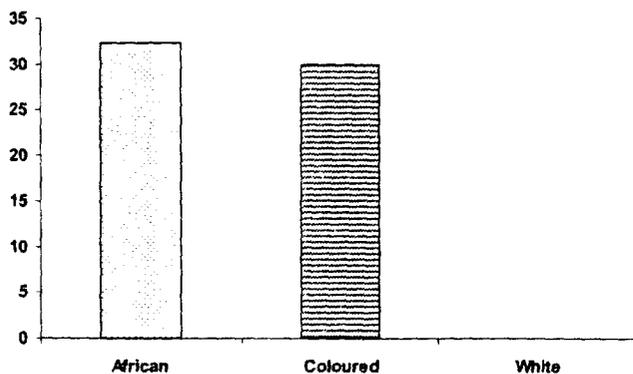


Figure 7 Percentage of learners taken to hospital after being injured during beating (n = 133)

tures prominently appears to legitimate and support similar disciplinary regimes in schools.

Those responsible for discipline in the home varied markedly by race group (Table 1).

The centrality of women in domestic discipline amongst Africans is significant while the fact that fathers are less frequently responsible for discipline across all groups with the exception of whites is in contrast to patterns of the not too distant past. We do not know what the importance of these patterns is, but they are likely to be of significance in understanding the continuing patterns of school discipline.

Table 1 Top 3 responsible for household discipline by race group (%)

	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Mother	65.0	57.4	41.0	43.1
Father	30.7	52.0	36.0	49.0
Grandmother	19.3	18.0	4.0	
Brother				3.0

Conclusion

South Africa's education system is changing and has a unique opportunity to entrench democratic practices. Specifically with respect to discipline and punishment there are signs that students are ready to relinquish their endorsement of corporal punishment and move to more consensual models. Yet corporal punishment continues, albeit in a milder form. If it is to be ended altogether, disciplinary practices at home cannot be ignored. They appear particularly in black, working class contexts, still to be highly authoritarian and depend heavily on physical punishment. Although this study cannot claim definitively to demonstrate that domestic patterns of discipline promote the continued use of corporal punishment at schools, there does appear to be a strong connection between home and school modes of discipline. Given that parents have been given a formal role in school governance, it is imperative that more research be done on parents, parenting and discipline. Furthermore it is important that the Department of Education begins to work with the real constraints of school-parent partnerships (and SGBs). Apart from channelling and heeding parental views, critical attention should be given to investigating the limits of partnership. Either parents have to be resourced in order fully and procedurally to participate, or their sphere of involvement should be tailored to take account of capacity.

It is tempting, as some have suggested,² to use the heavy hand of the state to force non-violent disciplinary measures into the home. A return to judicial authoritarianism, however, would be contradictory and, likely, counter-productive. Laws cannot and will not 'end' violence. The social structures and discourses that maintain violence need to be addressed. More strenuous and stricter application of the law may help but these measures should be complemented by programmes that examine a broad range of issues related to corporal punishment, for example, the way decisions are made, the meaning and exercise of authority and the rights of others. Only in this way will the gulf between human rights policy and current disciplinary practices be bridged.

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² In a letter to the Weekly Mail and Guardian (28 January to 3 February 2000), for example, Marianne Littlejohn calls for laws to be introduced to outlaw corporal punishment in the home. To support her position, she cites Swedish laws that have made it an offence to hit a child anywhere.

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