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Principals' Attitude Towards Corporal Punishment in Nigeria Secondary Schools

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Principals' Attitude Towards Corporal Punishment in Nigeria Secondary Schools

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I. INTRODUCTION

School corporal punishment, a form of corporal punishment, covers official punishments of school students for misbehaviour that involve striking the student a given number of times in a generally methodical and premeditated ceremony. The punishment is usually administered either across the buttocks or on the hands, with an implement specially kept for the purpose such as a rattan cane, wooden paddle, slipper, leather strap or a wooden yardstick. Less commonly, it could also include spanking or smacking the student in a deliberate manner on a specific part of the body with the open hand, especially at the elementary school level.

Advocates of school corporal punishment argue that it provides an immediate response to indiscipline and that the student is quickly back in the classroom learning, rather than being suspended from school. Opponents believe that other disciplinary methods are equally or more effective. Some regard it as tantamount to violence or abuse.

Infact, teaching in schools goes beyond gathering students for learning. It is all encompassing and discipline forms a major part of it. For Africans, especially in Nigeria, not sparing the rod is one essential

aspect of discipline. Unfortunately, flogging, as an example of corporal punishment and as a disciplinary measure is fast declining in most Nigerian schools, a situation many attribute to the decadence among students these days. Many teachers believe flogging students has no place in today's education. To them, the advancement of technology has made it imperative that teachers develop better ingenious ways of correcting students when they err instead of resorting to corporal punishment while others believe that teaching must necessarily include the use of the cane in a world indiscipline has eaten too deep into the moral fabric of the society.

However, it will become unacceptable when flogging gets to the extreme. Some teachers are just too harsh and over a little provocation, they descend on students and beat them with any kind of stick available and in the process inflicting severe injuries on their body, the scars of which may have to live with them forever. Such types of correctional measure should not be allowed in school and also at home.

Corporal punishment entails physical chastisement of a pupil in a school. It is a punitive response to students' misbehaviour and even has an extensive biblical support in the book of Proverb 22:15 and 23:12, which says:

Apply thine heart unto instruction and thine ears to the words of knowledge... foolishness in bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him... withhold not correction from the child; for if thou bestest him, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell.

Today, the desirability and effectiveness of corporal punishment had been called to question (Peretemode, 1992). While some school administrators and teachers support its use, others are strongly opposed to its use.

However, school administrators and teachers have power and authority to administer a school disciplinary programme. This power to control and discipline students for infractions is traceable to the age doctrine of in-loco-parentis (in place of parents). This position of principals and teachers with regard to disciplinary control of students, especially in imposing corporal punishment is well explained in the Corpus

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Julis Secundum (79 CJS: 493). As a general rule, school principals to a limited extent at least, stand in-loco-parentis to pupils under his charge and may exercise such powers of control, restraint and corrections over them as may be reasonably necessary, he is subject to such limitations and prohibitions as may be defined by law. The court in democratic societies all over the world has also viewed school officials as standing in-loco-parentis, allowing them to regulate the students in any manner subject only to the standards and restraints that the parents would use in supervising the welfare of the child (Nakpodia, 2011).

Over the years, the inflation of corporal punishment on recalcitrant children in the country has become an accepted method of promoting good behavior and instilling notion of responsibility and decorum into the heads of mischievous students (Nakpodia, 2011). It is presumed that any parent who sends a child to school gives this authority to school officers. But the desirability and effectiveness of corporal punishment have been called to question in recent times. While some parents, teachers and school principals favour the use of corporal punishment, others are strongly opposed to its use in schools. Gregory (1995) cited in Nakpodia (2007) made the following points in support of corporal punishments that some students only respond to corporal punishment; and that corporal punishment is effective because it makes students to think twice before committing the same offence. In addition, the use of physical punishment can

be a deterrent to other students who might violate a rule in the absence of such punishment.

On the other hand, Rathiff (1980) also cited in Nakpodia (2007) opposed corporal punishment based on the following reasons “that it is cruel; unreasonable corporal punishment is too difficult to prove in court, holds considerable potential for child abuse and tends to be discriminating; and also there are more effective non physical alternative that can be used in correcting student misbehavior.

Each year, hundred of thousands of students are subjected to corporal punishment in public schools despite the many problems associated with the hitting or paddling of students. Aside the infliction of pain and the physical injuries which offer result from the used of physical punishment, these violent disciplinary methods also impact students’ academic achievements and long – term well-being even after school. Despite significant evidence that corporal punishment is detrimental to a productive learning environment, there is still no federal prohibition on the use of physical discipline against children in public schools.

On the other hand, corporal punishment tends to prevent students from committing any serious offence; it creates fear in the minds of pupils and reforms the offender because pupils generally do not like their names to go into such books. Below is a format of a corporal punishment book; as one of the major pillars of punishment in general:

Table 1 : Corporal Punishment Book.

DATE	PUPIL'S NAME	SEX	AGE	CLASS	OFFENCES	PUNISHMENT	BY WHOM GIVEN	PRINCIPAL'S REMARK
5/01/2012	Akpasubi Joel	M	12	1A	Fighting and injuring Obornodje Gloria	10 strokes of the cane and a field to cut	Vice Principal Mr. Onosakponome	As a deterrent

II. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS: AN OVERVIEW

In Nigeria, the administration of corporal punishment has led to the loss of lives and permanent injury or disfigurement of pupils. The results of such unreasonable brutal and excessive corporal punishment has on several occasions led to legal suits by parents or guardians against the teacher concerned and the state Ministry of Education. Most state Ministries of Education in the country have therefore responded by restructuring the category of staff who can administer the cane.

According to Peretomode (1992), Imo State Education Edict in 1989 in Nigeria states that:

All punishment shall be reasonable, taking into account the age and sex of the offender and the nature of the offence. Corporal punishment shall be administered only by the school head, and no male teacher shall administer corporal punishment on a female student (p.11).

The Rivers State Ministry of Education Circular Letter of May, 1984, referred to in the chapter, even went steps further to dictate the maximum number of strokes (6) that may be administered and the offences that may attract such punishment. The dangers and fears associated with corporal punishment are very real. For instance, in the case of Fadahunsi Kokori v. A.I. Ukhure and the Benin Board of Education (1977), a student lost one of his eyes consequent upon the corporal

punishment administered by his teacher in the classroom. The teacher was charged for tort liability and negligence. The teacher's action contravened the fundamental right of the student – the respect for dignity of the human person, freedom from any form of torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment and the right to life, as entrenched in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The Benin High Court awarded the student N20,000.00 as damages.

The National Association of School Nurses define it as “the intentional infliction of physical pain as a method of changing behavior, which may include methods such as hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, use of various objects (paddles, belts, sticks or other), or painful body postures. Wikipedia free Encyclopedia sees school corporal punishment as covering all official punishments of school student for misbehaviors that involves striking the student a given number of times in generally methodical and premeditated ceremony, the punishment is usually administered either across the buttocks or on the hands with an implement specially kept for the purpose.

The American College Dictionary, (1953) defines corporal punishment as “physical injury inflicted on the body of one convicted of a crime and including the death penalty, flogging, sentence to a term of year etc,” The Californian Educational Code, (1990) Compact Edition, Section 49001 defines it as “the willful infliction or willfully causing the infliction of physical pain on a pupil”.

III. TYPES OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Corporal punishment which is a kind of physical punishment that involves a deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for an offence is mainly divided into three (3) types:

1. *Parental or Domestic Corporal Punishment* : This involves that inflicted by parents on their ward because most parents believed nothing else has worked except corporal punishment. It encompasses all forms of corporal punishment administered at home by parents or guardians.
2. *Judicial Corporal Punishment* : This is part of a criminal sentence ordered by a court of law, closely related to, it is prison corporal punishment ordered either by the prison authorities or by a visiting court.
3. *School Corporal Punishment* : These are corporal punishment undertaken within schools, when students are punished by teachers or school administrators for wrong done against rules and regulations.

IV. JUSTIFICATION AND CRITICISM OF SCHOOL CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

The issue of school corporal punishment have raised a lot of problems round the world as most

people and countries sees it as inhuman, a physical and psychological danger to its receivers and a source of abuse to the child.

During the 18th century, the concept of corporal punishment was attacked by some philosophers and legal reformers, some believe merely inflicting pain on miscreants it inefficient, since corporal punishment influences the subject only for a short period of time and effects no permanent change in their behavior whose purposes should be reformative and not retribution.

Poole, Ushkow and Nader (1991), supporters of corporal punishment in schools say that “as soon as the student has been punished he can go back to his class and continue learning in contrast to out-of-school suspension which removes him from the education process and gives him a free holiday.” Berrigan, a catholic priest also justifies the use of corporal punishment as it saves much staff time that would otherwise have been devoted to supervisory detention classes or in-school suspension.

Most people take school punishment as a disregard to humanity, unreasonable, holds considerable potential for child abuse, tends to be discriminatory with children from poor home etc.

V. GUIDELINES IN IMPOSING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

Gorton (1983) identified the following ten guidelines extracted from various court cases and often recommended by educational authorities:

- a. Corporal punishment should not be used at all except when the acts of misconduct are so antisocial in nature or so shocking to the conscience that extreme punishment seems warranted – Actus Rea “actual performance of the act” as opposed to Mens Rea.
- b. The particular offences that will result in corporal punishment should be specified.
- c. Evidence that other non-physical methods were used earlier in attempt to help improve the students' behaviour should be required before corporal punishment is employed.
- d. Corporal punishment should not be used in those situations where physical restraint is more properly called for.
- e. If possible, a neutral party, specifically identified should administer the punishment, rather than the person who was in conflict with the student.
- f. Corporal punishment should be administered only in the presence of another or administrator (or parent) as witness, an individual who was not in conflict with the student – Amicus Curiae “a friend in the matter, one who is not a party to the case but appears to call his attention to some point of law or facts”. Also, the school administrator can authorize another

teacher to inflict the punishment “colore – extending one’s authority by the virtue of his office”, “exofficio – by virtue of his office”.

- g. Exempt from receiving corporal punishment those students who have psychological or medical problems.
- h. Provide due process before administering the corporal punishment, including informing the student of the rule that has been broken presenting the student with the evidence indicating that the student has violated the rule and providing the student with an opportunity to challenge the allegation – Audi Alterem Partem “give the other side a chance; judgment can only be passed after hearing both parties to a case”.
- i. Specify the kinds of documentation that will be required for administering corporal punishment.
- j. Forbid corporal punishment to be used on a continuing basis for those students whose behaviour does not improve after it has been initially administered.

VI. EFFECTS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT ON STUDENTS

Harsh physical punishments do not improve students’ in-school behavior or academic performance but one way or the other cause more harm than what we have already. The following are some effects of school corporal punishment:

- 1. Causes depression, fear and anger.
- 2. Causes withdrawal from school activities.
- 3. Lowered school achievement.
- 4. Difficult with concentration.
- 5. Antisocial behavior.
- 6. Intense dislike of authority.
- 7. Somatic complaints and lose of respect.

The above mentioned effects of school corporal punishment have made some organizations opposed to the sue of corporal punishment in our schools nowadays.

VII. REASON WHY SCHOOL CORPORAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE BANNED

Due to the lasting effects placed on pupils when given these painful punishments, some countries have banned the use of corporal punishment in schools, while some still regards it as good means of punishment because it serves as a means of determent to others. The reasons why it should be banned are:

- 1. It has no place in the education of children. Corporal punishment is not allowed in the military, mental institutions and prison, research shows that children who are beaten and abused are more likely to be prone to depression, low self esteem and suicide.
- 2. It perpetuates the cycle of abuse.

Despite the above two reason why corporal punishment should be banned, 20 states still permit it in its schools. They are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indian, Kansas, Kentucky, etc.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that corporal punishment is the most frequently used form of punishment in secondary school; corporal punishment is not an effective tool in disciplinary control; and finally, there was significant difference between public and private secondary schools in the use of corporal punishment. It was recommended that the use of corporal punishment be discouraged in the school system and there is need for principals to employ better disciplinary techniques that would yield better results. The simple fact that corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure is not part of any education curriculum indicates that education at every level knows that corporal punishment has no place in the classroom; discipline can and should be taught by examples. In order to prevent the continued use of violence or the imposition of corporal punishment against children in our schools, the following recommendations were made.

- 1. Government should introduce and pass federal legislation prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in public schools.
- 2. Teachers and school administrators should be provided with tools and resources necessary to develop safe and effective methods for encouraging positive student’s behavior.

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