Research

What children say

Results of comparative research on physical and emotional punishment of children in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 2005

Preliminary results

Harriot Beazley
Sharon Bessell
Judith Ennew
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Save the Children
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During 2005, more than 3,000 children and over 1,000 adults from Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, and Viet Nam, took part in a project of comparative research on physical and emotional punishment. In addition to producing national reports, the way the process was organized enabled comparisons to be made, to find commonalities and differences in attitudes and practices. Comparative research enables identification of general trends as well as specific national and local patterns. Comparisons are necessary in order to combat the common claim that culture and tradition are valid excuses for hitting children. It also informs policy and programme interventions. If it can be shown that certain interventions decrease violence against children in a specific national context, then lessons can be learned about actions that will be effective in similar cultures – and counter-productive in others.

This preliminary account of the results of the comparative research is based to a large extent on reading and comparing the draft reports prepared by national teams about the data they collected (see References). The full report is based on comparative analysis across the full eight data sets (Beazley et al, 2006, forthcoming). 'Corporal punishment' and 'physical and emotional punishment' tend to be used interchangeably in this account in accordance with the Save the Children definition of corporal punishment, which includes physical, verbal and humiliating acts (Beazley et al, 2005).

Rights-based research

The research was designed to provide a statistical and descriptive account of what children say about the everyday violence - both physical and emotional - used as punishment against them within the context of childrearing, discipline and education. The title *What children* say does not imply that the research focused on collecting 'children's voices' through anecdotes, 'case studies' and illustrative quotations. In contrast, the research used a systematic, scientific approach, which sought information about children's knowledge, experiences and views, using appropriate methods through which they could express themselves easily and without risking further trauma.

The research was part of Save the Children Sweden Southeast Asia and the Pacific (SEAP) Regional Office overall strategic intervention to promote the abolition of corporal punishment of children in SEAP, which includes the priority need to address identified information gaps as well as building capacity in rights-based research with children on sensitive issues. Save the Children Sweden recognizes that only scientific, rights-based data should be used to develop focused, rights-based programme interventions. This begins by respecting and realizing the right of children to be properly researched, provided in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):

- Article 12: Children have the right to express their opinions in matters concerning them;
- Article 13: Children have a right to express themselves in any way they wish - not limited to the usual verbal expressions used by adults;
- Article 3.3: Children have the eight to expect the highest quality services - which includes the best possible research;
- Article 36: Children must be protected from all forms of exploitation, including being exploited through research processes and through dissemination of information.

The research was rights-based because it viewed corporal punishment of children primarily as a violation of their rights rather than as a problem for health, welfare or social order. Thus neither medical nor case-history models were used. In addition, children were involved as stakeholders in setting the research agenda in five of the eight countries. This was particularly helpful in developing research questions and identifying ethical challenges.

The general research questions, addressed by all national teams were:

- What do children think about physical punishment?
- What types of punishment are inflicted on children?
- What happens in the different contexts of punishment, including homes, schools, and institutional care?
- Who punishes children - and why?
- What do adults think about physical punishment and discipline?

The research was carried out by local teams in each of the eight countries. Through a preliminary workshop, in Bangkok, the teams were involved in designing a Regional Protocol, which established a core set of tools for use by all teams, including some options researchers could select at their discretion – for example whether to administer a tool as a group or individual activity (Beazley et al, 2005). The Regional Protocol was either incorporated into a National Protocol addressing additional local questions with extra tools, or used without change. Research teams were supported by a team of four international researchers experienced in the systematic, rights-based approach. The teams shared their experiences in data collection and collaborated in developing analytical categories, through a discussion board on a specially-designed web page.

The regional core tools included research diaries, body maps, drawings, ranking, an attitude survey and a 'protection tool' (which closed each data-collection session on a positive note, as well as providing data). Optional tools included essays, sentence completion, and punishment diaries. After every data-collection session a standard observation sheet was completed, to aid both national analysis and regional comparisons to be systematic (Ennew and Plateau, 2004). From the data collected, direct comparison was possible for five methods (Table 1). Other – less rigorous - comparisons were possible using the results of the drawing and diary tools, as well as a number of national tools, which included focus group discussions, interviews and methods modelled on participatory rural assessment approaches (Chambers, 1994).

Table 1: Tools used for direct regional comparisons

Tool	Number of countries
Attitude survey	8
Body map	7
Protection tool	6
Ranking	6
Sentence completion	5

Ethical strategies, which are particularly important in research with vulnerable and powerless groups such as children, were an important part of all protocols. Although an ethical strategy was incorporated into the Regional Protocol, each team developed a national strategy, using the same principles but taking into account local ethical challenges and dilemmas. Adult researchers have especial responsibilities to

children in research, the main principles being to protect children from harm and to ensure that their participation is voluntary and based on understanding what the research entails (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Although it is usually necessary to ask adults for access to a child, and to obtain the informed consent of parents and/or teachers, the informed consent of individual children must be sought, meaning that they have been informed of and understand:

- Research aims;
- Research methods and processes;
- Research topics;
- What the data will be used for;
- That it is possible to withdraw from the research at any time.

Children have the right to refuse to take part in research even if parents and teachers have given their consent. If children say 'No' they must not suffer negative consequences. In this last respect 'informed consent' might be better termed 'informed dissent'. No research participant should be cajoled, persuaded or intimidated into giving informed consent or withdrawing dissent. All research teams paid particular attention to the possible negative consequences for children of taking part in research on the sensitive and potentially distressing subject of physical and emotional punishment. In some cases counselling services were built in to national ethical strategies.

Samples

A total of 4364 children and adults took part in the research, 76 percent being children aged between five and 18 years (Table 2). Although this was primarily research with children, some adults were included (mostly parents and teachers) – largely to check between what adults and children say.

Table 2: Samples by country: adults and children (by gender where known)

Country	Children			Adults			Total		
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
Cambodia	250	254	504	122	153	275	372	407	779
Fiji	244	292	536	49	52	101	293	344	637
Hong Kong	36	36	72	dk	dk	51	dk	dk	123
Indonesia	dk	dk	813	dk	dk	16	dk	dk	829
Mongolia	dk	dk	607	dk	dk	40	dk	dk	647
Philippines	69	70	139	34	44	78	103	114	217
Republic of Korea	69	83	152	32	143	175	101	226	327
Viet Nam	225	273	499	85	219	306	310	579	805
Totals	[857] [46%]	[1008] [54%]	3322	[322] [35%]	[611] [65%]	1042	[1179] [41%]	[1650] [59%]	
	Children 76%			Adults 24%					**4364**

Unfortunately, not all research teams reported on the gender of participants, even though they recorded this attribute. From the gender disaggregations received it seems that the proportion of boys (46 percent) and girls (54 percent), while not equal, was at least equitable. The fact that women represented the largest proportion of adults whose gender was known (65 percent) reflects the common feature of research with 'parents' of children in school that it is mothers who are more visible and therefore easier for researchers to contact.

Table 3: Samples by country; children according to context

	Cambodia	Fiji	Hong Kong	Indonesia	Mongolia	Philippines	Rep Korea	Viet Nam	Totals
Home and school	444	536	72	813	552	0	0	471	2888
Institution	0				55	0	0	28	83
Other	60					139	152	0	351
Totals	504	536	72	813	607	139	152	499	3322

In order to maximize sample size most national teams chose to carry out data collection in schools, but children who responded to the research in samples drawn from schools also provided information about corporal punishment in homes, while children who took part in the research in their homes discussed school punishment as well. Thus 87 percent of the regional sample consisted of children who shared experiences from these two major contexts of childhood (Table 3). Other situations in which data were collected included programmes and projects for children, institutions for children outside family care and children in the street. It was usually possible to gather additional data on punishment within families from these children. The Mongolian sample of 55 children in institutional care was drawn from four different types of facility: for child workers, for detention, for tracing and for childrearing.

Table 4: Samples by country children: geographical location

	Cambodia	Fiji	Hong Kong	Indonesia	Mongolia	Philippines	Rep Korea	Viet Nam	Totals and %
Urban	316	244	72	427	92 + 55*	139	152	238	1735 [52%]
Semi-urban	0	179	0	0	276	0	0	0	455 [14%]
Rural	157	113	0	63	184	0	0	159	676 [20%]
Remote	31	0	0	323	0	0	0	102	456 [14%]
Total	504	536	72	813	607	139	152	499	3322

* 55 children in four institutions

Just over half the regional sample of children was drawn from urban areas (two thirds if urban and semi-urban are combined), which reflects the relative ease of sampling in urban areas, as well as the high degree of urbanization in, for example, Hong Kong and the Republic of Korea (Table 4). The Cambodian research team, which had developed the most systematic and elaborated sampling frame among the eight countries, compensated for being unable to reach remote rural areas (because of the rigours of travel in the rainy season) by reducing their urban sample. It was pleasing that, within the rural sample, which represented one third of the total, 41 percent of child participants were from remote areas. This reflects the determination of some research teams, and enabled material to be collected from groups of ethnic minority children.

Preliminary results

Preliminary analysis of the eight draft reports, together with early statistical comparisons of raw data from the core research tools, shows some clear similarities between the very different countries. The most notable features were adult confusion about punishment, the extent of physical and emotional punishment in homes, and the prevalence of punishment by hitting children with an implement and/or through verbal abuse. In view of the violence of the punishment described by many children we refer to some of these practices as 'assaults' and 'attacks', to signify that they are serious violations of human rights.

Adults' conflicting thoughts, feelings and actions

One conclusion from regional analysis is the direct result of systematically examining what children say about their experiences of physical and emotional punishment in relation to data gathered from parents and teachers. The most notable and universal result of this regional research process arose from comparing what adults say they feel and think about punishing children, with what children say adults actually do. This became clear through triangulation of data from different tools, samples and locations, particularly through comparing results within the attitude survey data and between this tool and data from both children's body maps and the optional sentence-completion tool.

Throughout the research results there is a consistent double contradiction, which psychologists would describe as 'cognitive dissonance', operating among adults in all countries. 'Cognitive dissonance' is the term applied to the common human psychological trait of living with contradictions between what is thought, felt, done or said. Cognitive dissonance leads to individuals trying to justify behaviour that they would otherwise consider to be 'bad', in order to re-establish a sense of personal emotional coherence and comfort.

In the first place, this research showed dissonance between adults' attitudes towards punishment and their practices when disciplining the children in their care. For example, in the results from the Philippines and Viet Nam, both teachers and parents said that direct physical assaults were the 'last resort' of discipline but, when this was cross-checked with what children said, only a small number validated this assertion. Philippine researchers report that 'adults regarded [hitting and scolding] with distaste … yet these were the same forms that were reported by children.'

When, as in Fiji, adults were encouraged to reflect on their own childhood experiences of punishment there was a notable similarity between what they remember and what their children report now. For example, a 30-year old Fijian male remembered experiences that were 'emotionally upsetting and a chilly sensation in the body and mind.' According to responses to the attitude survey tool, 87 percent of adults feel unhappy after they punish a child, yet they continue to punish in the same way that they had suffered themselves. The fact that they remember personal suffering does not seem to have moderated their behaviour when called upon, in their turn, to administer discipline to the next generation.

The discomfort resulting from this dissonance is also shown in other data. The general agreement among adults in the research, that punishment is integral to discipline, was contradicted by equally general agreement that 'explanation and counselling' are the best responses to misbehaviour. Eighty percent of children and 91 percent of adults indicated that children should be counselled rather than hit when they have done something wrong. Nevertheless, according to their drawings and

body maps, few children in this research seemed to have encountered adult counselling and explanation in response to their faults. It is interesting that, according to this evidence, adults do indeed know about 'alternatives to corporal punishment', which they claim not to know according to the results of other research (Nogami et al, 2005). Thus it appears that it is not ignorance that causes adults to adopt the quick-and-easy option of hitting children rather than taking the time to explain – even if their actions make them feel uncomfortable.

In the data from core research tools, violent behaviour between adults as a trigger to violent actions against children was only mentioned in Cambodia. As children commented, such adult violence (including that resulting from drunkenness) does not provide them with good role models. Indeed, drunks are not well-known for their ability to explain. In Maluku, one of three research locations in Indonesia all of which were in post-conflict areas, a small group of adolescents interviewed each other (four girls and 10 boys). Eleven of these children commented that violence in the community exacerbated parental violence towards children; alcohol and substance abuse as well as inter-village feuding being mentioned as causal factors. These children's explicit desire for peace points to a need to pay attention to anger management among parents and teachers. But, just as important, is an implicit question that neither research respondents nor researchers posed: 'Why do adults not make a habit of explaining the rules *before* they are broken?' This might not only prevent some breaches of good behaviour but also avoid having to try to explain and counsel afterwards, when tempers may be frayed.

A further contradiction is that, although some adults say they experienced shame and negative feelings during their own experiences of physical punishment in childhood, many still appear to think that physical punishment is an educational necessity for proper child development. Thirty seven percent of adults agreed with the statement 'Punishment is needed to make children behave well', and 56 percent that it is necessary so that they 'know right from wrong'. To deal with discomforting cognitive dissonance, other adults go further and claim to be happy after punishing children, because they have thus fulfilled what is widely-perceived to be their duty, according to results of the attitude survey. The idea of the 'cane of love' described in Republic of Korea, like the notion in the Philippines that punishment is a demonstration of love, may in fact be 'band aid' solutions for the psychological unease of adults' cognitive dissonance.

Types of punishment

The data from both core and optional tools show that adults produce a seemingly vast array of responses to children's mistakes and misdemeanours, most of which involve either physical assault or verbal attack. While the children's drawings collected under the title 'What happens when I make a mistake' tended to emphasize a full range of punishments, including emotional punishment, body maps gave more information about purely physical punishments (mostly direct assaults), providing information about where on the body, with what and by whom, children were punished.

The research shows that, throughout the eight countries, children are punished a good deal. The main punishments recorded were direct physical assaults, indirect physical assaults (such as confinement) and verbal attacks. In addition, although far less frequently, children were disciplined using:

- Hazardous tasks – mostly boys;

- Increased chores – possibly more frequent for girls, but with some age differences also;

- Physically challenging activities, such as running around the school, standing in the sun or doing press ups – once again mostly boys;

- School copying tasks (which many children described as 'stupid');

- Exclusion or neglect – being chased away from home, forced to sleep outside the house, or suspended from school;

- Restrictions – such as 'grounding' or being forbidden to watch television, common for older children at home.

Restrictions were mentioned mostly by urban children and not usually scored as 'punishment'. In other words, 'punishment' is closely related in children's conceptual schema to both physical assault and emotional pain.

All national reports provided extensive lists of the varied and sometimes 'inventive' ways in which children are punished. Among these, the lists from Viet Nam, where body maps recorded over 40 kinds of punishment and children reported many injuries resulting from punishment, stand out as catalogues of the sheer brutality that can be involved. One such list, from focus group discussions with children and social workers, includes:

- Beating with a stick (mostly at home, where 88 percent of children reported being hit with a stick);
- Being forced to kneel for long periods of time;
- Being hung up;
- Being hung up and whipped;
- Being made to stand barefoot on the spiky skin of durian fruit;
- Being tied next to an ants' nest;
- Being tied to a bicycle or motor bike and forced to run alongside it;
- Ear twisting;
- Electric shocks;
- Having their heads immersed in water;
- Humiliation (especially by grandparents);
- Kicking;
- Smacking;
- Verbal assaults.

Hair pulling, ear twisting and cheek pinching were commonly reported in all countries. When children described where they were hit they mentioned first their limbs, then their backs, buttocks and heads, with some apparent gender differences, which need further analysis, although there are some indications already that girls tend to be hit on their legs and arms, while boys receive blows to the torso.

Punishment rates derived from different tools and samples vary from 80 to 97 percent between countries, and tend to show a considerable amount of punishment taking the form of direct physical assaults through hitting, punching and kicking, as well as verbal abuse. It seems that hitting children with an implement, such as a stick, belt, whip, or even heavy objects such as fire tongs, is preferred to simple slapping with the flat of a hand. Diary data collected by researchers from West Timor, in the Indonesian study, indicated that almost every child had been hit, slapped, punched and kicked.

Reasons for punishment

Reasons for punishment, given by both adults and children, can be clustered under three main headings: misdemeanours, disobedience and academic failings. The school results are a reminder of Michel Foucault's comment that schools introduce into children's lives a social economy of often minute and apparently arbitrary rules and concomitant punishments, unknown in other contexts, which serve the purpose of educating children about power relationships (Foucault, 1979). This is reinforced, as a large number of reports in this research show, by children being punished twice - both at school and at home - for not succeeding in school assignments and examinations.

Who punishes and where punishment takes place

Preliminary results indicate that a better question than 'Who carries out punishments?' would be 'Who punishes whom?' At home, mothers seem to punish most of all – especially younger children and girls – while fathers punish older boys. Teachers are also significant among adult punitive agents, especially for older children, and more for boys than for girls. Indonesian and Vietnamese data also mention other relatives, most particularly grandparents in the latter case.

In almost all cases, direct physical assault and verbal attacks are the most common methods of punishment reported – and more of this happens at home than in schools. Indeed the situation at home is sometimes the reverse of the situation at school, which suggests the need for state intervention in the private arena as well as the public.

In Cambodia, over 80 percent of children in the study, of all ages, reported being been punished at home. Being hit with hand, foot, cane, stick or whip were the most common forms, although direct assaults of other kinds were also reported. In Vietnamese diary data, 24 percent of 499 children reported being beaten with a stick, mostly (88 percent) at home and 38 percent being slapped (73 percent at home). Seventy-five percent reported verbal abuse – more among older children, in the Kinh majority and in urban areas.

Legal restrictions on the use of corporal punishment were shown by the results not always to be implemented (sometimes to the surprise and dismay of researchers). In Hong Kong, where corporal punishment is prohibited in schools, far more physical and emotional punishment was reported by children at home than at school (half the latter being coded as 'verbal assault'). The physical punishments at home – reported by 95.7 percent of the Hong Kong sample - included 66.2 percent direct assaults, which means that children are better protected from violence at school than at home. Almost all children in the sample (97 percent) reported physical punishment at school, but – in contrast to homes - only two percent of these punishments were direct assaults. The remainder of school punishments, in Hong Kong as elsewhere, tended to be punishments such as having to stand for long periods of time or being made to run around the school. Other punishments common in schools were 'mandatory tasks' such as copying out passages. Teachers can clearly inflict punishments that are corporal – in that they affect children's bodies – while evading the 'hitting' focus of legislation. Thus, in Viet Nam, where it is forbidden to hit children in school, teachers are reported to punish rural children by making them gather a forest plant that causes skin irritation and to use this to clean the blackboard, resulting in sore, inflamed hands.

As already mentioned, there is often a link between the reasons for punishment at home and at school. Punishment at home in the Republic of Korea – where, according to children's punishment diaries, 61 percent of punishment takes place - is 'usually direct assault' by smacking or with an implement, and major reasons are poor results from school work or failure to do homework. In this case, it is especially likely that children will be punished in both contexts for the same 'mistake'.

Information about punishments in institutional contexts was only provided through data from the 55 children in the Mongolian national report, as data from the small institutional sample in Viet Nam were not analysed separately. Nevertheless, these data are disturbing. In the four types of institution - which varied from penal to protective - the most frequent punishment to be verbal attacks, followed by direct physical assaults, with consistent use of punishments that can be defined as torture – being beaten with a rubber truncheon, and forced to stand all day in the sun or to maintain a half-squatting position for long periods of time. A quarter of child research participants from Mongolian institutions reported this kind of punishment. This research also revealed an institutional culture of bullying by adults, which is being passed on to children, who also beat up and bully each other; boys beating girls and older children victimizing younger inmates.

Frequency of punishments

Data on frequency of punishments are derived from body maps and punishment diaries and possibly show the greatest national divergence, although this may be due more to differences between national diary tools and thus illustrates the need for comparative research to be systematic. Very frequent hitting was not found in many cases other than the West Timor study in Indonesia. Around half the children in most data (slightly more boys than girls) receive a significant punishment once a week. The Cambodian data seem to indicate that children are usually punished less than once a week, only around one percent being punished every day.

Nationally-designed diary tools were used in Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Viet Nam and Indonesia (where they differed between research sites and correlated with information from body maps). Indonesian data once again show the most frequent punishments to be hitting with an implement, followed (with almost the same frequency) by being made to stand on one leg while holding ears. Being scolded (*dimarahi)*, regarded as serious in Indonesia, is close behind in frequency, after which comes being kicked.

In Mongolia, punishment diaries were filled out by children in schools and institutions, aged 10 to 15 years, over five days, and showed a surprising weekly pattern with 54 percent of children punished on Monday reducing over the week to 23 percent on Fridays. The most frequent punishment throughout the week was verbal abuse (24 percent on Monday and 27 percent on Tuesday but reducing by a sudden drop to 9 percent on Friday). This contrasts with data from West Timor, which showed an even distribution of punishments throughout a seven-day period.

The most common punishments after physical assault and verbal attack recorded in the Mongolian diaries were beating and punching. This record of frequency correlates with data from Mongolian children's body maps, with the exception of verbal abuse, which rarely occurs in data from this method. Body maps recorded 91.4 percent of 245 children being beaten, just over half reporting being pinched and

or kicked, and just over a third being slapped, but body maps do not provide information about how often punishments occur.

Overall the research indicates that there are differences between frequency of punishment at home and at school. While being hit and verbally abused are the most common punishments, they seem to be more frequent at home than at school. Mongolian researchers report, for instance, that 'the chance of children getting punished on a regular basis at home is three times higher than at schools.'

Differences in punishment patterns

The Confucian ideal of filial piety is only one cultural expression of the overall stress on obedience to elders in the Southeast Asia and Pacific region. 'Obedience' is indeed mentioned as a general idea and even as a reason for punishment (see Nogami et al, 2005), but appears to operate as an ideal. In recognition of reality, perhaps, the statement 'A good child is obedient at all times' was not widely supported in the attitude survey by either adults or children.

Attitude survey results, on statements about the need to hit boys and whether it is proper to hit girls, make it quite clear that the general feeling in all countries is that both sexes can be physically assaulted in the name of discipline. There was very little comment that no children should ever be hit. Indeed, there was a significant absence of comment from either adults or children that corporal punishment is a violation of children's rights, which is somewhat disappointing given the amount of child-rights training that has taken place in the countries involved. Children for their part appear to tolerate punishment, and even expect this as part of adult duty towards them. But, as will be discussed later, this is most likely to be influenced by the fact that punishment is part of 'normal', everyday life as well as being due to the guilt some of them express about disobedience or making mistakes.

Although further comparative analysis of the data is needed, some variation in both national and local patterns of punishment can be discerned. For example there seems to be very little scolding in Indonesian areas in the research (Maluku, North Maluku and West Timor) although 'aggregated data mask quite serious differences' and the use of a local tool in West Timor showed insulting verbal punishment being used. On the other hand, there were relatively few direct assaults reported in the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong. Vietnamese researchers report differences in punishment patterns between majority Kinh and minority ethnic groups. Ethnic minority children in the research did not report as much violent punishment as the Kinh majority – but this may have been a reflection of different understandings and the fact that the researchers were working through interpreters. Some rural-urban differences appear to be worth further examination. In Cambodia, on the other hand, the researchers found no significant differences between patterns of punishment in urban, rural or remote areas, which may be a reflection of the relatively low and recent level of urbanization in that country.

In general terms, direct assault seems to be more common on younger children – especially boys - while older children – especially girls – are subjected to verbal abuse and humiliation or less-punitive disciplinary measures, such as 'grounding'. As parents told researchers in Viet Nam, 'You can reason with an older child'. But once again there are national and local differences: girls are hit a little more frequently than boys in the Mongolian sample, while in Fiji small boys seem to bear the brunt of direct physical assault as punishment. In Hong Kong, the pattern seems to be

physical punishment for younger children and emotional punishment for older children.

What is worse - hurt inside or hurt outside?

Some earlier international research appears to indicate that children find the emotional injuries of punishment more painful than physical damage. To explore this, the Regional Protocol included ranking exercises after both drawings and body maps. Contrary to research reported elsewhere, when children ranked the punishments they had described in both methods, across all age, gender, ethnic, geographical samples, direct assault was ranked as the worst punishment. Indonesia researchers commented that children argued during the ranking sessions that all types of physical punishment are 'painful and potentially dangerous because they can result in serious injury and sometimes bleeding.' Cambodian data indicate that being hit on head is the worst punishment, which may be due not only to the resulting pain but also to the fact that to touch someone else's head is supremely insulting in East and Southeast Asia.

The relatively low occurrence of emotional punishment within the ranking order may be a consequence of the association of ranking methods and drawing – it is not easy to draw verbal attacks, although some children did. Ranking tools also showed the need for better understanding of the meaning of 'punishment'. Adults tend to conceive of 'punishment' as physical, and to include a smaller range of practices – usually confined to direct assaults. Children tell another story, including punishments such as ear twisting, which is generally reported to 'hurt a lot' and be quite prevalent in all countries. One contrast to the general pattern in ranking punishments was reported from the Republic of Korea, where emotional punishment was not frequently reported because, as researchers commented, children 'did not regard emotional punishment as punishment.' Similarly, Hong Kong children, who counted confinement and isolation as 'emotional' punishment, said that this hurts more than any other kind of punishment *except being hit* (which occurred infrequently in this sample).

Effects of punishment: The hit-hurt learning process

Despite not ranking emotional punishments among the 'worst' kinds, children referred in all tools to the emotional discomfort of physical assault. The effects of being hit reported by children – apart from actual physical harm (bruises, swellings, headaches) - included fear of serious injury (among older boys), feeling sad, feeling bad, feeling ashamed or embarrassed (in front of peers), low self esteem and thoughts of suicide. Sometimes children commented on being puzzled by the punishment they received. 'The pain stays with you, you don't forget, it doesn't matter if you forgive [the punisher] – it stays with you,' was the comment of one 14-year-old Fijian boy.

Like adults, children seem to have contradictory attitudes towards punishment. The attitude survey data show some interesting contrasts between children and adults with respect to acceptance of the necessity for punishment. When the responses are combined, the majority of children and adults disagreed with statements that punishment is necessary either to make children behave well or so that they can 'learn right from wrong'. Of those who agreed, whereas 37 percent of adults agreed that punishment is necessary to make children behave well, more children (45 percent) were of this opinion. Yet the proportions were reversed with respect to needing punishment to 'learn right from wrong'; only 33 percent of children agreed,

compared to 56 percent of adults. These results provide interesting food for thought about the frequently-reported ‘fact’ that children approve of punishment and the way this can be used to justify continuing physical assaults in the name of discipline and adult duty. For example, researchers in Republic of Korea comment that:

> Due to the influence of the traditional social ideology … there are cases where children blindly accept the presumption that physical punishment holds meaningful educational intentions.

One argument against the contention that punishment must be good for children because they approve of it, is derived from children’s rights. To take children’s opinions (usually termed their ‘voices’) as some kind of authentic truth is to place a tendentious gloss on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 says we should ‘take into consideration’ children’s *‘opinions’* – this does not give ‘children’s voices’ an irrefutable authority. Adults also have a responsibility to weigh these opinions against children’s evolving capacities, which includes the learning experiences to which they have been exposed.

One clue to unravelling this apparent conundrum is that girls appear to be more likely than boys to accept punishment by saying that it ‘changed them for the better’, or they ‘deserved it’ – although girls were also more likely to complain that a particular punishment was unfair, unjust or just plain stupid (being excluded from lessons for not working hard enough, for example). Boys were more likely to respond to punishment with feelings of anger. Girls’ acceptance of authority to punish and of blame for the ‘fault’ for which they have been punished, particularly as they get older, is surely related to the lowering of their self-esteem in the process of learning gender roles. Thus, teenage girls in this research were the only group that tended to rank emotional punishment (verbal assaults and humiliation) as worse than other punishments.

In addition, the differences between younger and older children were as significant – if not more so in some national studies – than differences by gender. To put it another way, these differences, between younger and older, female and male, highlight the power structures of patriarchy – the cross-cutting power relationships between gender and generation that constitute the basis of social and political structures. Statistical analysis of the Hong Kong data specifically shows a trend by which, as age increases, so does children’s acceptance of punishment. Acceptance of corporal punishment is thus learned throughout childhood, as part of psychological accommodation to power relationships, of which gender roles are only one part. ‘It is OK to hit weaker people’ is closely related to ‘Females are weaker’ as well as to ‘Children are weaker’. In all three cases ‘weakness’ not only correlates with lesser physical strength but also with lack of social power. Thus, adults seem to fit the punishment more to the age/gender pattern than to the misdemeanour. Patriarchy produces a structure in which adults tend to choose the punishment that hurts the most for the social category (age/gender) to which the child involved belongs, while at the same time imparting lessons about who has power and who has not.

Finally, the regional results produce a picture of disrespect for children as well as violence against them. Kicking, punching, hitting with an implement, mishandling bodies by pinching and twisting, verbal attacks, even spitting, are indeed acts of aggression and ungoverned anger, against which children have little or no defence and for which they can seek little recourse. Their response is to learn, in the case of boys by externalizing their feelings of anger and for girls by internalizing them as guilt. These swift, angry responses to children’s perceived faults are supreme acts of

disrespect on the part of adults and thus a fundamental violation of the human rights of children. Discipline should recognize children's dignity through explanation, patience and giving them time. Taken overall the results of this regional comparative research reveals that the main challenge for societies is not to address 'man's inhumanity to man' but rather adults' inhumanity to children.

Main messages

The preliminary conclusions of this first analysis of data from the comparative study of physical and emotional punishment of children are divided under two main headings: first the conclusions reached through analysis of what children and adults said in the course of research, and second the recommendations consequent on those conclusions.

Conclusions

- The research shows the widespread prevalence of (often barbaric) corporal punishment of children in all eight countries;
- The research results also show that it is essential to ask children about their experiences and attitudes; specific information provided by children not only identified previously unknown (or unacknowledged) forms of corporal punishment, it also revealed patterns of violence against children that must be addressed in legislative change and programme interventions;
- The research revealed differences between countries but more importantly highlighted notable similarities, which show that corporal punishment is a near-universal violation of rights against which the trump card of cultural specificity should not be played (Alston, 1994); a conclusion also reached in a desk review of legislation and research in 19 countries in the region (Nogami et al, 2005);
- The results highlight physical violence towards children in their homes in the name of discipline; predominantly direct assaults, especially hitting with an implement;
- Analysis reveals considerable dissonance between what adults say they think and what children say adults do;
- Gender differences seem to be less marked than ethnicity and location, but most differences are linked with age, which is the dominant factor;
- Patterns of physical punishment are the framework through which children learn about and assimilate ideas about power relationships;
- Where direct comparison is possible between adults and children (especially in the attitude survey) children tend to agree with adults, but less strongly – which probably reflects them repeating what they have been told/taught to think;
- The study of children in a variety of institutions in Mongolia reveals punishments that can be clearly identified as torture under the UN Convention against torture;
- Some children in all countries are not subjected to corporal punishment; some adults must therefore have found and used other means of discipline.

Recommendations

- The human-rights obligations of states should be fulfilled:
  - Implement an explicit and immediate ban on physical and emotional punishment of children in all contexts: families and homes, schools and all other places of education, institutional care, alternative family care, penal systems and workplaces;
  - Take corporal punishment out of the notion of 'culture' and 'tradition' and treat it as what it is – a violation of the human rights of children;
  - Intervene in the private area and stop the physical and emotional punishment of children in their homes through legislation and public education;
  - In view of the greater violence against children as punishment in homes compared to schools, intervene with laws (and measures for implementation) to prevent the corporal punishment of children in their homes;
  - Research, supervision and monitoring of punishment in private and state institutions for the care of children outside family care is an urgent state duty;
  - Create an enabling environment for change, so that legal changes are effectively implemented, through public education, research, monitoring and advocacy.

- Public education is an urgent necessity for both states and civil society:
  - Parent education (especially within Early Childhood Development programmes) would seem to be the best way of effecting intergenerational change, especially if boosted by legal reform and public education; education in anger management and conflict resolution being probably more important than 'alternatives' (which parents do already know);
  - Teacher education in alternative classroom management skills;
  - For both parents and teachers understanding that 'better at' school tasks does not mean 'better than' other children – patience with those who are slower academically and respect for a variety of other skills, abilities and achievements.

- Emotional punishment must be taken seriously. Advocacy against this disrespectful form of violence against children should be based on further research on the forms it takes and on the consequences of verbal attacks and humiliation.

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Cambodia: *Fact-finding draft: Study on physical and emotional punishment of children* (Draft 5 December, 2005).

Fiji: *A study on the physical and emotional punishment of children in Fiji* (Draft 24 December, 2005).

Hong Kong: *Comparative research on the physical and emotional punishment of children in SEAP: A Hong Kong study*, (Draft October 2005).

Indonesia: *Physical and emotional punishment of children in Indonesia: A study of three locations – Maluku, North Maluku and West* Timor (Draft November 2005).

Mongolia: *Report of research on the physical and emotional punishment of children in Mongolia* (Draft February, 2006)

Philippines: *Comparative research on the physical and emotional punishment of children in Southeast Asia Pacific (SEAP)* (Draft December 2005).

Republic of Korea: *The study on physical and emotional punishment of children in Korea* (Draft 9 December 2005).

Viet Nam: *Educating or abusing? Study on physical and emotional punishment of children in Viet Nam* (Draft 19 January 2006)

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