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CHILDREN EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE II: PREVALENCE AND DETERMINANTS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study was undertaken to reveal the prevalence and determinants of corporal punishment in preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) schools in Alexandria.
Methods: A cross sectional survey targeting preparatory and secondary school students enrolled in main stream public schools was conducted. The multistage random sample technique was adopted to select a priori estimated sample of this population. They were requested to fill a self administered questionnaire to collect relevant information. Data were analyzed using the univariate and multivariate analyses.
Results: A substantial proportion of boys (79.96%) and girls (61.53%) incurred physical punishment at the hand of their teachers. Teachers were using their hands, sticks, straps, shoes, and kicks to inflict such punishment without sparing a part of their students' body. Physical injuries were reported by a significantly higher percentage of boys ($\chi^2_1 = 12.26$, $p = .00046$) the most common being bumps and contusions followed by wounds and fractures. Moreover, it was only among boys that serious injuries such as loss of consciousness and concussion were encountered. Both univariate and multivariate analyses revealed that corporal punishment was more likely to be used in preparatory schools and on boys. Such means of punishment were also predicted by students' undesirable behavior as well as their poor achievement in academic tasks.
Conclusion: This study indicates that corporal punishment in school is used extensively to discipline students whose behavior doesn't conform with the desired standard of educational institutions. However, since it is no longer perceived as a method of discipline, other alternatives can be used providing that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills for its application. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd

Key Words—Corporal punishment, School, Prevalence, Behavior, Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

SCHOOL HAS ALWAYS been recognized as an institution for the transfer of knowledge and culture to the future generation. It has also a major influence on the child's development and

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behavior (Wolkind & Rutter, 1990) since it is a dynamic human system dedicated to the nurturing of mutual growth and understanding between children and adults (Schultz, Glass, & Kamholtz, 1987).

In schools, teachers play an important role as educators and disciplinarians (Wilson, 1982). To assume their responsibilities, teachers sometimes resort to the use of physical punishment. Such means of punishment has been met with great opposition (Committee on School Health, 1984, 1991; Office of the General Counsel, 1992) as it is no longer perceived as a method of discipline (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child & Family Health, 1983). Indeed, discipline means imparting knowledge and promoting skills to improve one's behavior rather than corporal punishment (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child & Family Health, 1983). It is accepted that teachers may resort to physical force or restrain in selected situations to protect students or staff members from physical injuries or property damage (Committee on School Health, 1991) but not for behavior modification.

In Egypt, the use of corporal punishment on school students is banned by a ministerial decree (Office of the Minister of Education, 1971). Nevertheless, the number of incidents which occurred in Alexandria during the scholastic year 1996–1997 including the one of a child who incurred retinal detachment at the hand of his teacher (Kamel, Fouda, Abdel-Gaffar, Kamel, Youssef, Atta, Khashab, & Abdel-Aziz, unpublished) indicates that corporal punishment in schools is used and to a degree might be extensive or unreasonable. To reveal the extent of use of corporal punishment in schools and its predictors in terms of students' characteristics and behavior, this study was undertaken.

METHODS

Study Design, and Sampling Technique

A cross sectional survey was carried out targeting preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) school students enrolled in the main stream governmental schools (public schools) in the seven educational zones in Alexandria during the scholastic year 1996–1997. Such settings ensure the representation of the vast majority of children attending schools and the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, preparatory and secondary school students are old enough to provide accurate and reliable information by themselves sparing the time of interviewing students individually.

The multistage random sample technique was adopted to select two schools, one preparatory and another secondary from each educational zone yielding a total of 14 schools. The total number of students to be selected was estimated using the following equation: $n = (Z^2 * p * q)/D^2$ (Kish, 1965).

Since the actual prevalence of the condition under study is unknown, the probability of its occurrence was estimated to be equal to that of its nonoccurrence ($p = q = .50$) and a value of .02 was chosen as the acceptable limit of precision (D). Based on these assumptions, the sample size was estimated to be 2,401 students.

Prior communication with the local directorate of education revealed that in preparatory and secondary schools, the number of students vary between 45 and 65 with an average of 55 students per class. Accordingly, to reach the desired sample size, a total of 43.65 classes were to be selected. This number was rounded to the nearest figure to be divided by the chosen number of schools ($n = 14$). Hence, from each school, three classes were randomly selected, one of each grade, to allow the representation of all age groups. Owing to the variability in the number of students per class and the high rate of absenteeism encountered in some schools, a total sample of 2,170 students was reached.

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