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# Dhaka Tribune

## Is corporal punishment really effective in classroom discipline?

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- Published at 02:09 am May 23rd, 2018
- Last updated at 02:10 am May 23rd, 2018

During a survey, 90% of the guardians interviewed noted that the practice of corporal punishment was still prevalent at schools where their children go **Mehedi Hasan/Dhaka Tribune**

Half of all primary school students in Bangladesh still experience corporal punishment in the classroom despite a government ban on physical punishment.

Teachers, parents and students said punishments which hamper the psychological and physical wellbeing of students are quite common in most schools.

Students can be verbally abused and even physically assaulted for failing to respond to questions or complete their homework, and for talking to other students.

The Report Card Survey published in January 2016 by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) found 52.7% of students experienced corporal punishment at schools.

This was despite the High Court outlawing all forms of corporal punishment - including caning, beating, chaining, and confinement - in primary and secondary schools and madrasas in a ruling on January 13, 2011.

“It is quite common,” an eighth grader at a renowned school in Mohammadpur said. “Mostly it is math, science and PT teachers (who) beat us with their hands.”

A student of a school in Dhanmondi said teachers “regularly” beat them for talking with peers, for not bringing in their homework and other reasons. “The use of the cane is quite common,” he said.

Data compiled from newspaper reports by rights watchdog Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) show incidents of corporal punishment are still prevalent but have declined, from at least 516 students in 2011 to 105 in 2017.

However, human rights activists say the actual numbers could be much higher as most incidents go unreported since guardians fear that students will be given poor marks if their teachers are charged with such offences.

“Special arrangements have to be made to discipline children, instead of beating them,” Moqsud Malaque, deputy director at administration unit of ASK, said.

“Our Teacher Training Institute can introduce special training sessions mainly for primary school teachers, as we noticed that most of the corporal punishment took place in primary schools and madrasas.”

Moqsud said the government cannot directly apply the High Court’s directive in schools.

“Changes in the education system and behaviour should also be made instead of blaming the teachers only,” he said.

Moqsud suggested every school can form a student torture prevention committee to care for the mental health of students and teachers.

### **Legal provisions**

**The Convention on the Rights of the Child states unequivocally that all forms of corporal punishment in the family, school and workplace must be prohibited.**

The National Children Policy 2011 stipulates that “all forms of physical and mental punishment in educational institutions shall be prohibited, and a child-friendly system of imparting lessons be introduced so that the children and the adolescents do not have any physical and mental injury”.

The Children Act 2013 also provides legal protection to children against physical violence.

Section 70 of the act states that if a person is found guilty of assaulting, ill-treating, neglecting or forsaking any child under their custody, charge or care, leading to an injury or loss of any organ of the child’s body, then it will be treated as a punishable offence.

### **Why is it so prevalent?**

**Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), with the support of Save the Children, interviewed 126 teachers from urban and rural areas in Dhaka and Chittagong for its December 2017 survey titled “Corporal Punishment on Children in Schools: Present Scenario and Preventive Responsibilities”.**

Every teacher interviewed said the use of physical punishment was the most effective way of controlling children in the classroom.

About 64% of the guardians interviewed said they were unaware of the laws that forbid using such punishment, while 90% said the practice was still prevalent at schools where their children go. Half of urban parents said teachers contact them when their children break rules, while 58% of rural parents said their children are caned at schools when they are found to have been disobedient.

Over half (55%) of all teachers said they had not seen or received any notification of the 2011 ban on physical punishment.

### **How brutal it can be?**

**On January 21, 2018, a primary school teacher in Mawna unit of Gazipur Shaheen Cadet Academy injured 17 fourth graders by beating them with a steel ruler for making noise and for “rehearsing the national anthem” inside a classroom.**

Abdul Maleq, the teacher in question, vented his anger by mercilessly thrashing the minor students, mostly aged 10, after finding them shouting and singing the national anthem.

Sirajul Islam, a director of Mawna unit of the academy, said the teacher was found to be mentally ill and was suspended.

“The children got frightened after the incident, but we assured them of no such incident would take place again,” he said.

AKM Amanullah Aman, the father of a fourth grader who was injured in the incident, said his child had needed to move schools to aid his recovery.

“My child was traumatized by the incident,” he said. “He was beaten with a steel ruler, injuring his head.”

SM Sohel Rana, the father of a seventh grader who was not beaten, also shifted his child to another school fearing a repeat of the corporal punishment.

### **How does it affect students?**

**CAMPE Executive Director Rasheda K Choudhury said corporal punishment is rooted in an “age-old mentality” of teachers and guardians that it is required to make students more disciplined.**

“In most institutions, teachers prefer not beating but to insult students or psychologically undermine them,” she said.

“For example, if a child is a bit weak in studies, they are verbally undermined in the class. But the most horrific incidents happen in madrasas which in most cases do not come into media.

“Parents think beating children in madrasa is common so neither teachers nor parents are bothered about it. But the incidents traumatize the children and they have to suffer it for a long time.”

Rasheda, who is also the former education adviser to a caretaker government, said the education ministry has been asked to put the HC instruction in all educational institutions.

“They have agreed to do it, but we do not see its implementation as of now,” she said. “Teachers also need to be trained properly and parents need to be aware of the adverse effect of such punishment.”

Prof Dr Mohit Kamal, head of psychotherapy at the National Institute of Mental Health, said children who are beaten by teachers often have to suffer alone.

“They do not want to go to school because of fear and keep it to themselves as they cannot share it with parents,” he said. “If the trauma continues, they may become psychologically ill in the long run.”

According to the psychologist, kids who face corporal punishment feel insulted, stop talking to people, and get eventually traumatized.

“They not only fear the selected teachers, but gradually fear all teachers. They become aggressive; sometimes they also beat their fellows over minor incidents,” he said.

“Corporal punishment is not the key; rather, encouragement is the key to discipline.”

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told the Dhaka Tribune that the number of such incidents has come down significantly.

“The practice of corporal punishment was very common in the past, so our government took the initiative to stop it,” he said.

“When we took the initiative, most guardians and teachers were against it as corporal punishment is a common and acceptable practice to bring discipline among students.”

Nahid said the initiative was taken considering the physical and psychological impact on students.

“If you physically punish students to bring discipline, it would act as u-turn as students will rather have negative attitude towards teacher or schools and will stop coming to classes.

“We have always urged the teachers to try to change students’ behavior through care, motivation and affection, as punishment alone cannot bring any good results.”

The minister said that whenever such cases are reported, action is taken against the offending teachers including suspension, transfer and suspension of salaries.

“We are campaigning to stop corporal punishment in educational institutions, with the key line that only motivation can help bring discipline among students,” the minister said.