

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Holistic approach to prevent injuries and corporal punishments in schools

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**KEYWORDS**

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Violence;  
Safety of children;  
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Rights of children

**Abstract** Prevention of injuries in schools is a big problem due to accidents and interpersonal violence. The extent of problem varies in different schools and different communities in India. In this study, views of students, parents and teachers were taken to provide safe schools and quality education. Interpersonal violence may be amongst students or as corporal punishment to students. It is common dilemma of the parents and teachers that what should be done if students do not perform. Teachers usually take disciplinary action to curb the habits of non-performance in their homework or during the examination. Many parents also think that teachers have not many options if their wards are not doing well in the schools. Students on the other hand generally dislike or hate corporal punishment. To reach at the scientific conclusion a study was done to find out the views about this complex problem in India. In these study students, their parents and teachers participated to know the extent of the problem of corporal punishment, their views about this problem and what are the alternative means to solve this problem of non-performance by the students. Simultaneously problem of interpersonal violence amongst the schoolmates was analysed. Accidents while in schools were also studied and ways have been suggested after analysis of data to reduce the injuries. Results of the study are being presented to show that how teachers, parents and students should act coherently to reduce the rate of interpersonal violence and accidents in schools. Recommendations based upon suggestions from the participants to reduce the risk of injuries due to corporal punishment and other factors are being provided.

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### 1. Introduction

In Asian subcontinent and particularly in India it has been a trend that students in schools are physically punished if they do not conform to the set social behaviour or they do not do their homework properly. This punishment varies from physical abuse to psychological abuse. Due to uncontrollable anger of the teachers this may result in injuries and deaths. Response of different children is different to the menace of corporal punishment. A child tries to cope up with this maltreatment in

different manners. Children respect and admire teachers and this punishment may lead to anger and frustration and may diminish the intimacy which a student has towards the teacher. If this abuse becomes chronic then there will be persistent attempts to cope up with abuse which may result in anger, sexual acting out, alcohol abuse and similar self-destructive behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Children even as small as less than 3 years are not immune to corporal punishment. Such a small child got beating from the head teacher for weeping in the school over something which the small child did not like.<sup>2</sup> There is evidence to suggest that negative outcomes are worse if the onset of abuse is in early childhood.<sup>3</sup> Many cases of sexual harassment of girl students by teachers have been reported. Many girls of a school alleged that a particular drawing teacher was sexually harassing them and they refused to go to school.<sup>4</sup> Girl of class XII had accused a teacher of raping her.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes children cannot tolerate this and even try to commit suicide. One such girl child tried to commit suicide by jumping into a river.<sup>6</sup>

Gorea et al. are of the view that teachers give the punishment to erring students both physically and mentally.<sup>7</sup> They have described injuries in two cases of corporal punishment in schools. They have reported another six cases of such punishment in their area in their study. They are of the opinion that this should be stopped to let the buds blossom to beautiful flowers with pleasing fragrance. Highlighting the evil of corporal punishment in schools in newspapers and conferences led to a ban by the High Court in India.<sup>8</sup>

Even in many cases school teachers have been suspended or dismissed from their service for beating the children. In Haryana, i.e., one of the states from India eight teachers have been suspended for charges of sexual harassment of girl students and three teachers were arrested in Simla for sexual exploitation of minor girls in an institute for deaf and dumb girls.<sup>9</sup> In India many people considered corporal punishment after indiscipline as part of life. Even parents asked teachers to be stern with them and put them into discipline by way of slapping children if they did not behave properly or do their work.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Raghvan committee corporal punishment in schools was a contributory factor in development of bullying tactics and ragging tendencies in students as per the observation of the supreme court of India.<sup>11</sup> National commission for protection of child rights NCPCR has included slapping, beating with a scale, pinching, locking student alone in the room, making student sit like a chair or kneeling down and making a child run in the school as corporal punishment so as to give a direction to the teachers to forbid them from these practices.<sup>12</sup>

Even to petty events school teachers respond sometimes in most absurd ways which can have lifelong effects on the mentality of the school children. In Medhanpalli village of Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh state in India one teacher named Rose Merry poured molten wax from burning candle over groin region of a girl student of UKG and burned her skin. The teacher wanted the child to confess that she had stolen money of a fellow student. A case was registered against the teacher.<sup>13</sup> Eleven-years-old girl of MCD School was punished for not doing the homework. She was asked to stand in sun for more than an hour. She was a student of class 2nd.<sup>14</sup>

Due to this corporal punishment abuse the trust between teacher and student is broken. The breach of trust between a student and teacher who is in a position of trust causes effects

beyond physical and mental trauma. There is erosion of self-esteem, fear of closeness and ill-conceived attempts to avoid unpleasant reminders of child abuse. Some students may put blame on themselves for this happening and cause of current distress.<sup>15</sup>

Excerpts of article 37 adopted by convention on rights of child on November 20, 1989 and came into force on September 2, 1990 in accordance with article 49 declares that state parties shall ensure that: no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release, shall be imposed, for offences committed by persons below 18 years of age.<sup>16</sup>

Injuries due to corporal punishment fall well within WHO definition of child abuse. "Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."<sup>17</sup> Corporal punishments cause both physical and emotional ill treatment and causes harm to child's health and development.

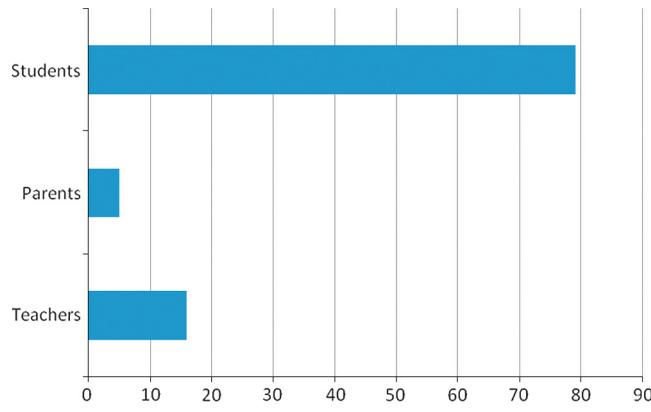
Injuries in school are not exclusively due to corporal punishment but it has been seen that many students get injuries while playing in schools when supervision is lacking. Students also get injuries when they are fighting with each other. Lack of safety precautions may also result in injuries to children.

## 2. Materials and methods

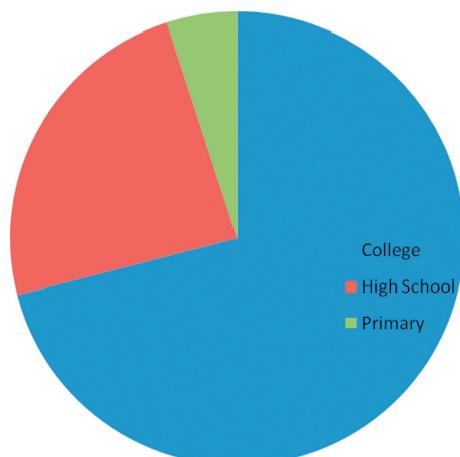
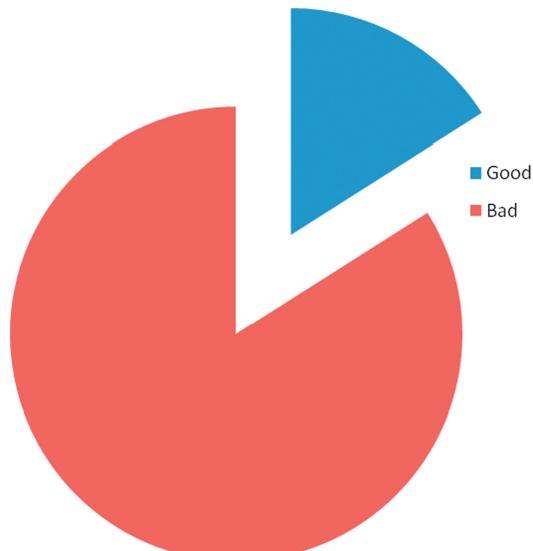
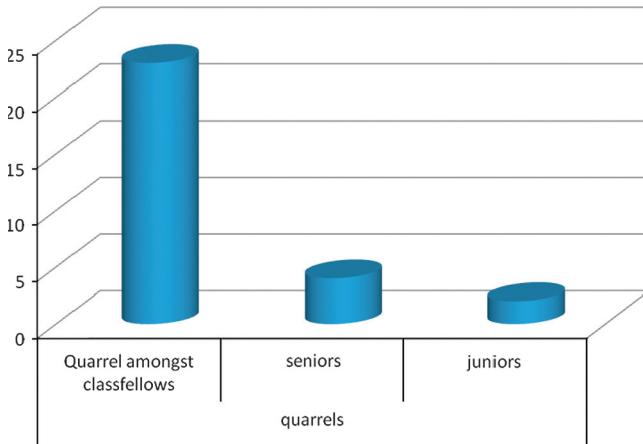
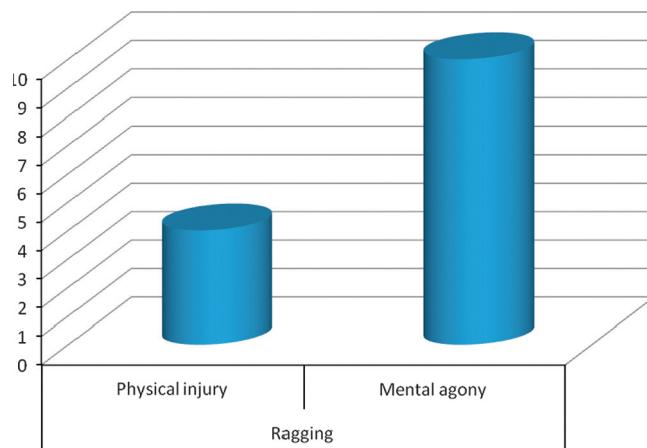
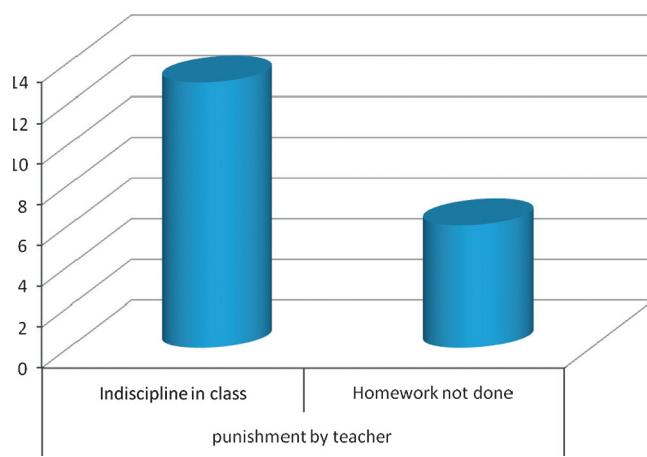
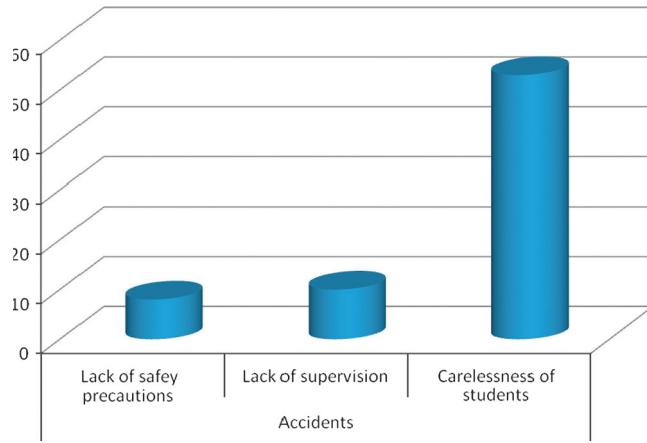
A random survey was done amongst students, teachers and parents to find out the answers to the complex aetiology and psychology responsible for corporal punishment and neglect in schools which may lead to faulty development of children. This study was done in 2009 in the schools and colleges concerned with the authors. Participants filled a prestructured proforma with multiple choices which they had to choose.

## 3. Results

In total 210 persons participated in the survey. One hundred and forty-four participants were college students who had put in their experience as school and college students. Other participants were parents, teachers and school students.



**Figure 1** Profile of participants.

**Figure 2** Educational status.**Figure 3** Punishment by teachers.**Figure 4** Injuries due to quarrels.**Figure 5** Injuries due to ragging.**Figure 6** Injuries due to punishment by teacher.**Figure 7** Injuries due to accident.

All the graphs show value in percentage. In this study maximum number of participants was students as shown in Fig. 1. Students from college were also chosen as they were more mature to describe their experiences of school as shown in Fig. 2 though it also had primary and high school students. Majority felt that corporal punishment is bad yet some

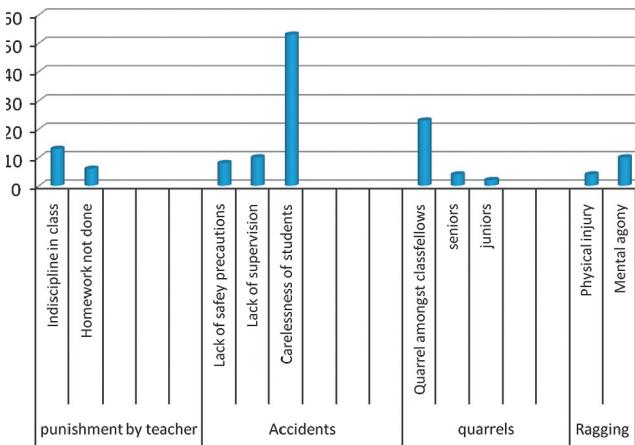


Figure 8 Profile of injuries.

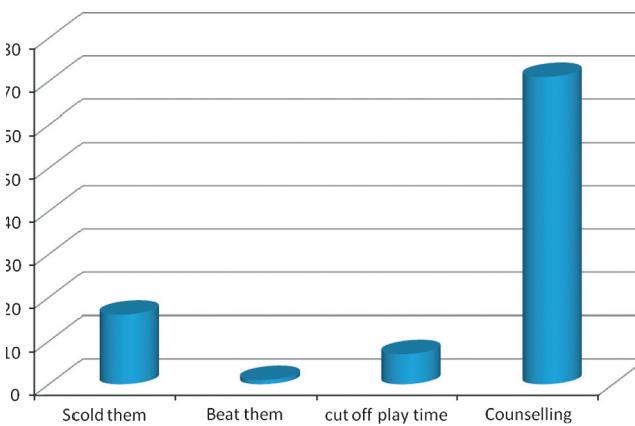


Figure 9 What should be done if students misbehave?

students accepted it as beneficial as shown in Fig. 3. Most of the injuries due to quarrel were amongst the class fellows but this was not exclusive and students suffered injuries at the hands of juniors and seniors also as depicted in Fig. 4. Ragging was also responsible for injuries though it caused more of mental agony as shown in Fig. 5.

Corporal punishment also resulted in injuries to students. Teachers resorted to this mainly because of indiscipline in the class. Other factor for this was incomplete or avoiding homework given by the teachers as shown in Fig. 6.

Injuries also resulted from accidents which were mainly due to carelessness of students as shown in Fig. 7. Lack of supervision and lack of safety measures also played a part in overall injuries pattern (see Fig. 8).

#### 4. Discussion

To prevent injuries due to various factors in the schools majority of students opined that student counselling is the best treatment as is clear from Fig. 9. Reducing playtime or just scolding may be effective according to some other students. To get physical punishment was least accepted norm.

To stop the quarrels amongst students counselling by teachers was the most preferred way and second to it was conveying this to parents and jointly they find out a solution. Some stu-

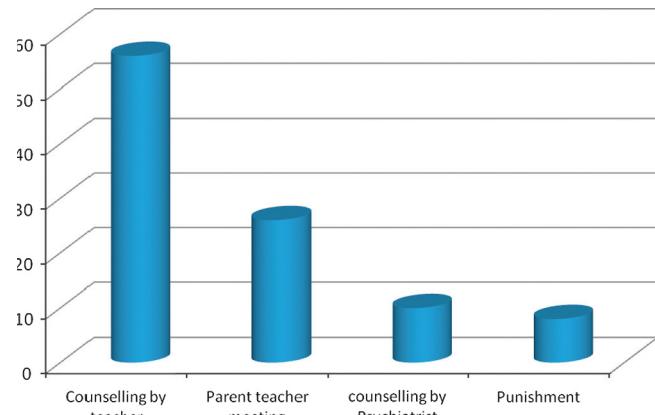


Figure 10 What should be done to stop fights?

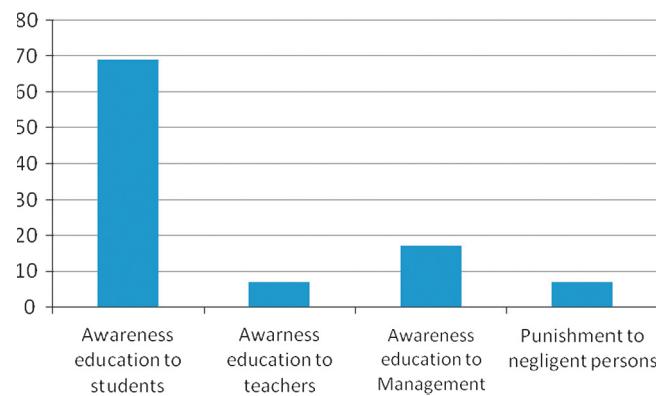


Figure 11 What should be done to stop accidents?

dents preferred counselling by psychiatrist to solve their problem to avoid fights as is clear from Fig. 10.

Awareness education to students could reduce injuries due to accidents but simultaneously management should also be made aware of the same. Awareness education to teachers could also help in reducing the injuries. Some form of punishment to the guilty persons responsible for negligence will also prove helpful in reducing injuries due to accidents in schools as per Fig. 11.

In spite everybody knowing that corporal punishment is not liked by students and there are rules and judgements by the courts which admonish corporal punishment still the corporal punishment is being practiced in various parts of the country; reason being the lack of awareness about the laws and fallouts of corporal punishment on the future life of students. According to Gracia and Herrero (2008) we will have to challenge the beliefs which lead to corporal punishment of children.<sup>18</sup> Medical professionals and forensic nurses can diagnose the problem and make the public aware about maltreatment of children in schools. They can also contribute by educating the public about this problem.

Some other important suggestions to reduce the injuries and corporal punishment in schools include:

- Awareness should be created in the society for child rights.
- The students should be told about the incidents and accidents that can happen due to their and other's negligence.

- They should be taught that they must follow the rules and move around systematically.
- Education and examination system must be improved to make it less stressful for the teachers as well as for the students.
  - Regular interaction between parents and teachers is necessary to discuss the problems faced by the child.
  - Proper drinking and parking facilities should be made available so that there is no overcrowding at these places which may lead to injuries due to accidents.
  - Schools should follow the government rules and norms honestly as it will make a safe environment for the schools.
  - Rules and regulations should be implemented to maintain discipline which will result in less injuries.
  - Students should be taught to be sincere to work, to speak politely with respect and humbleness.
  - Some teachers say that it is almost impossible for them to maintain cool towards a disturbing student as they are over worked and preoccupied with other tasks. Parents should also share the same level of responsibility to inculcate manners and self-control in their wards as teachers do.
  - Corporal punishment should be banned strictly in schools and colleges and stress should lie on moral education of the students.
  - Students should be given practical demonstrations to know about accidents and to prevent the same.
  - Students should be treated like adults.
  - Physical punishment may lead to insult to self-respect which if hurt, a student cannot become a good citizen.
  - Teachers should not pick and choose on students for various activities and all students should get the fair chance to participate in activities under careful supervision of teachers.

The local police can take cognizance of cases of corporal punishment only if it results into physical injury. As these cases occur in schools and the persons responsible for informing the police are usually the offenders, such cases are often not reported to the police. Only if corporal punishment results in severe damage only then cases of corporal punishment are reported to the police by the parents. Cases reported to the police are not even the tip of the iceberg in India. Teachers often say that it is a reasonable chastisement for the betterment of the student but violence can never be justified in schools. Violence causes deviations in the normal development of the child.

## 5. Conclusions

There is a strong need to make the teachers aware about the ill effects of corporal punishment. Results of the study show that how teachers, parents and students should act coherently to reduce the rate of interpersonal violence and accidents in schools. Awareness education to teachers and parents about the views of children must be carried out.

### Conflict of interest

None declared.

### Funding

None declared.

### Ethical approval

Only consenting volunteers were taken in the study and no ethical approval was needed from any other authority.

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