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#  ANALYSIS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AS A METHOD OF DISCIPLINE ON CHILDREN IN HOMES AND SCHOOLS

The National Association of School Nurses (2010) defines physical or corporal punishment as an act that deliberately causes physical pain with the aim of changing the behavior of a child. It could be in form of spanking, hitting, pinching or telling the child to stay in awkward position that will inflict a certain level of pain on the child. The history of corporal punishment can be traced to ancient times even as far as the times of Jesus. Unlike this present day where corporal punishment is used on children only, corporal punishment in the past was used on adults too. In the 18th century, whipping was the most common form of punishment that was used on minor crime offenders. The most common form of corporal punishment in the 18th century was birching. Birching is a type of punishment that involves beating a person across his or her backside with a type of whip known as a birch twig.

Scholars around the world have been divided on the issue of using corporal punishment on children in school and homes or not. While Africans on the one hand generally see corporal punishment as an acceptable form of discipline for children in order to ensure children and young adults live according to the good morals of the society, Western counterpart on the other hand perceive corporal punishment as a form of child abuse and violence against the child. A position that has made government of Western countries enact laws against such act. However in African countries, the use of corporal punishment still remains largely an acceptable practice and is mostly used in schools and homes as a method of discipline. Parents and teachers agree that using punishment as a method of discipline gives them some form of control over children. However, results showed that excessive corporal punishment force children to embrace dishonesty in order to avoid being punished by their teachers. Corporal punishment is known to have increased aggression, depression, low cognitive ability, low self-esteem amongst children even as far as violence in relationships and marriage. Corporal punishment not only promotes violence in the society, it leads to mental disorders.

In 2016, Gershoff and Andrew Grogan- Kaylor published a major meta-analysis which used over 75 studies that involved over 160,927 children and found a link between corporal punishment and thirteen negative outcomes like anti-social behavior, poor moral internalization, aggression and violence during adulthood and many others. Corporal punishment not only promotes violence in the society, it leads to mental disorders.

The use of corporal punishment have been justified by its supporters as a way of addressing what is believed to be the rebellious nature of adolescents, a way of ensuring that law breakers are punished while they serve as a warning to the other children who intend to commit the same act. Some advocates for the use of corporal punishments back it up with bible passages like Proverbs 22:15 which says “foolishness is in the heart of a child but the rod of correction shall drive it away from him.” Another bible passage that parents and teachers often use to justify the use of corporal punishment is Proverbs 23: 12-14 which says:

Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the word of knowledge. Withhold not correction from the child: for if you beat him with a rod, he shall not die. You shall beat him with the rod of correction and shall deliver him from hell. Asides using biblical passages to justify the use of corporal punishment, research works have shown that parents income level, their level of education or stress level could contribute to the rate at which parents apply corporal punishment on children.

In Nigeria today, teachers and parents have a misconception that physical punishment which is a form of physical abuse is the appropriate and best method of instilling discipline. To these administrators, discipline involves the use of harsh treatments that inflicts pain on the child in order to correct the wrong behaviors of the child. They back their actions using bible scriptures like Proverb 13:24 that says “he who spares the rod hates his son but he that loves him is diligent to discipline him”.

The word discipline originates from a Latin word “diciplina” which means to instruct, to correct, strengthen, or perfect. This implies that it is expected that the aim of instilling discipline on a child is to correct the individual in a loving manner that would show respect for the receiver of the message. Eggleton (2001) defined discipline as a set of training that reforms the moral behaviors, encourages obedience to laid down rules without necessarily using any form of punishment. To discipline children is essential in managing the attitudes of children and ensuring that they grow up into responsible adults. However, several studies have shown that corporal punishment might not necessarily result in the desired moral reform as expected by the administrator of the punishment. Instead, the use of corporal punishment might lead to the child or children displaying anti-social behaviors like lying. In addition to this, using physical punishment could destroy child-parent relationship as they mature into adults. Studies have also shown a link between corporal punishment and child sexual abuse. This is to say that children who are physically abused through corporal punishment are likely to be sexually abused and silent about it. This is as a result of fear that children develop for the administrator of the punishment.