Student and Teacher Perceptions of Corporal Punishment and School Violence in Ohio High Schools

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Chapter I. Introduction

In recent years schools have become a popular topic in the media because of all of the violence that occurs there. Students shooting other students and teachers, stabbings, and even everyday fights are leading topics of discussion and criticism in the news. The blame for the outbursts continuously gets shifted from family to society to the government and so on. However the place that needs to be focused on is the schools themselves. The discipline practices taking place within the schools needs to be examined in order to determine if there is a connection between corporal punishment and student misbehavior, aggression, and alienation.

Corporal punishment in the schools has decreased dramatically since the turn of the nineteenth century. However even as recently as the late 1970’s, it was reported that there were more than one million cases nationwide of corporal punishment in the schools, 10,000 of which required medical attention (Adams, 2000). Violent discipline can have a lifetime effect on children who experience it and can influence their own future violent behavior toward others (Adams, 2000). Children learn by example, and if they are being physically punished at school, their future behavior can be reflective of this early treatment (Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998).

Victimization of children by teachers and administrators often in the name of discipline is seldom recognized for its potential contribution to the misbehavior, aggression, and alienation of students (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Corporal punishment is still allowed in 23 states and verbal mistreatment remains prevalent (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Data suggests that at sometime the majority of students experience or witness verbal maltreatment (Hyman & Weiler, 1994). Many children are expelled or suspended
from school each year for bringing weapons to school. Too often the thing that is overlooked, is that the majority of those carrying weapons are doing so in order to protect themselves not to cause any violence (Adams, 2000).

The problem of violence in schools appears to be revolving all around the students, but that aspect should be looked past in order to see the antecedents which are present in the schools which could be causing the problems discussed on the news. Corporal punishment and other forms of discipline should be examined in order get a complete picture of school violence. This study will attempt to determine whether corporal punishment in Ohio schools has any connection to student misbehavior, aggression, and alienation. In order to determine this, some questions need to be asked. The first question is how do male and female high school students perceive corporal punishment and student violence in their current school as well as their past elementary and middle schools? A second question to examine is how do male and female high school teachers perceive corporal punishment and student violence in their school? A final area to look at is do male and female high school students have the same perceptions about the discipline approaches and the violence among students, as the male and female high school teachers?

This study could be quite broad so it is restricted to only include Ohio high school teachers and students. Both make and female teachers and students will be included from urban, suburban, and rural areas. One area that could limit the study is the reliance of the researchers on the honesty of the answers of the participants. Another area that could limit the study is that there is not a lot of research in existence on the subject matter of corporal punishment leading to misbehavior, aggression, and alienation of students. A
final limitation is that some teachers might not view discipline as a victimizing problem that contributes to student violence.

By understanding the amount and extent of corporal punishment in the schools, this study hopes to identify a possible cause for the violent behavior prevalent in students today. Further research in this area is needed to make the public aware of how corporal punishment can possibly influence student behavior.

Chapter II. Literature Review

Policies and Practices that Contribute to School Violence

Hyman and Perone (1998), within their article, contend that there is sparse data to support the contention that student victimization by school staff relates to student misbehavior and violence. They agree with the fact that school crime exists, but that inaccurate perceptions of this type of crime can lead to bad policy decisions about how to deal with it. This could, therefore, cause more harm than good, as more programs were based on punitive rather than preventative and remediation efforts. The consequences of misperceptions regarding the real extent of school violence is that schools have increasingly adopted law enforcement rather than educational models to support violence reduction.

The media often portrays school violence as peer and teacher victimization, but overlook the important aspect of victimization of students by staff. This is seldom recognized as a problem that may contribute to student alienation and aggression (Hyman & Perone, 1998). According to Hyman and Weiler (1994), data suggests that the majority of students witness or experience verbal maltreatment at some time. Legally and socially
sanctioned disciplinary practices such as corporal punishment, abusive “motivational” and disciplinary statements to and about students (Hyman, 1990; Richardson & Evans, 1993), and the overstated use of punishment procedures, have the potential to cause serious and even long-lasting, emotional harm. This could lead to increased student hostility, anger, and aggression against school property, peers, and authorities.

Corporal Punishment

According to Flynn (1996), the physical punishment of children has always been an accepted, even expected, aspect of American families. It is known that as parents’ support for corporal punishment increases, so does the frequency and severity of its use (Straus, 1991). Therefore, it is an important aspect to look into within school institutions, as teachers take on the parent’s disciplinary roles within the school setting, and thus corporal punishment can have some implications within schools. Straus (1994) defines corporal punishment as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child’s behavior” (p. 4).

Within the school system, corporal punishment has been found not only to be a problem, but that its effects are insidious and little recognized. The school has a major influence on the child’s development and behavior. The teachers play an important role as educators and disciplinarians, and thus, to assume their responsibilities, they sometimes resort to the use of physical punishment (Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998). Students are physically punished for violent and nonviolent acts, as well as for behavior that does not conform to the standard of the educational institution. Corporal punishment
is emotionally destructive, and affects the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship, and
cut off all modes of effective communication that play a crucial role in promoting
student’s emotional health and well-being (Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998). According to
Straus (1991), not only does the impact of corporal punishment have an effect on the
individual family, but also on the larger society. Socially accepted forms of violence,
such as spanking, may lead to greater use of force and violence for illegitimate purposes,
for example, criminal behavior. It is, therefore, important to study societal norms
supporting corporal punishment since they are the antecedents for its use by parents and
the school system. Researchers, educators, and policy makers need to take into account
the variability of spanking attitudes by contextual, as well as by social factors (Flynn,
1996). The relationship between attitudes toward corporal punishment and its actual use,
and the role of social and cultural variables in influencing that relationship needs to be
explored.

Zero Tolerance

There is little evidence to support that zero tolerance procedures have increased
school safety or improved student behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Faced with
disruptive and aggressive behavior, a typical response of the school system has been the
punishment and exclusion of students exhibiting challenging behavior (Skiba & Peterson,
1999). With the zero tolerance policy, it tends to punish both major and minor incidents
severely in order to “send a message” that certain behaviors will not be tolerated (Skiba
& Peterson, 1999). Noguera (1995) has argued that the disciplinary policies are adopted
less for their effectiveness than for their strong symbolic value, attempting to reassure
administrators, parents, and teachers that strong actions are being taken in response to a perceived breakdown of school order. Schools that rely heavily on zero tolerance policies continue to be less safe than schools that implement fewer components of zero tolerance. Over-reliance on physical security procedures appears to be associated with an increased risk of school order, and the misuse of school security measures such as locker or strip searches can create an emotional backlash in students (Hyman & Perone, 1998).

Summary

The literature reveals that researchers have discovered a positive relationship between physical punishment and numerous undesirable outcomes, including aggression, behavioral deviance, substance abuse and criminal activity, low economic achievement, and depression. Despite increasing evidence that corporal punishment can have harmful effects, belief in the value and effectiveness of corporal punishment remains strong in American society.

These articles attempted to provide conceptual clarity to the idea of discipline, but also to demonstrate how discipline and violence are related concepts. This is vital for the schools and parents to know, as it is a steppingstone to come up with preventative, rather than punitive discipline strategies.
Chapter III. Methodology

Sample Selection

A sample of male and female high school students and male and female high school teachers will be randomly selected from the Ohio school systems. This sample will include urban, suburban, and rural school settings, as well as male and female students and teachers, in equal proportion, in order to examine all aspects of attitudes about corporal punishment in schools. The following sampling procedure will be done to select the participants.

The teachers and students will be selected according to a stratified random sample, in order to ensure equal representation of urban, suburban, and rural areas, as well as male and female students and teachers. A total of 6000 participants will be selected. Three thousand male and female high school students and 3000 male and female high school teachers will be targeted for this study.

Instrumentation

This study will use two surveys to collect data. The format of the surveys will be similar in that both will contain scaled and open-ended items. There will be demographic information (e.g., gender, school setting, year in school, etc.) included as well. Each survey will have less than 50 items in total. The survey will be short enough to keep the attention of the participants, but it will encompass the vital information needed for this study.
One survey will include questions about students’ attitudes and perceptions of corporal punishment in regards to school violence. The questions on the student survey will look at how they were disciplined in elementary school through their current status in high school, and how they perceive violence in their current school. The other survey will include questions about teachers’ perceptions about the discipline practices their current assignment and how they view violence in their school.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving the 6000 names and addresses, a cover letter will be attached to each survey describing the intention of the study and asking for their anonymous participation. The surveys will be sent to each participant’s home address in the middle of January with prepaid return envelopes. After a month, a reminder letter will be sent to those who have not responded, once again asking for their participation.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed through the frequencies and percentages of the returned surveys, descriptive statistics, and one-way ANOVA where school settings, gender, and teacher versus student responses are compared. As a way of checking the ANOVA results, an independent samples t-test will be run on each criterion (school setting, gender, and teacher vs. student) as well.
References


