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Can Sri Lankan teachers afford to spare the rod? Teacher attitudes towards corporal punishment in school

Iresha M. Lakshman^{1*}

Abstract: This study attempts to understand teacher attitudes towards corporal punishment (CP) in Sri Lankan Government schools. A purposively selected sample of 28 Government school teachers from four schools in Colombo participated in the study. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with the teachers. It was found that a majority of teachers in the sample have resorted to some form of CP at some point in their career as teachers. Given the teaching-learning culture teachers have been exposed to as children and the authority traditionally attributed to teachers in Sri Lanka, they were mostly of the opinion that CP can have positive impacts on children and their future success. Teachers did not seem hostile to the idea of CP per se but the “form” and “severity” of CP administered on students. They thought that CP becomes an “issue” only when teachers use it in brutal/inhuman manner with vindictive intents and as a means of stress release. High levels of work related stress and weaknesses in teacher recruitment were highlighted as resulting in situations of “brutal/inhuman beating” in schools. The views expressed by teachers raise important policy implications particularly in the areas of teacher training and recruitment.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In recent years corporal punishment administered by Government school teachers in Sri Lanka has become a key concern for children, parents, educators and policy makers. Laws have been implemented with little or no success. There is a dearth of research conducted in this area in order to understanding the causes and effects of this phenomenon in such a way that it can be effectively remedied. Traditionally, Sri Lankan parents have been tolerant or had a neutral attitude towards corporal punishment in schools. However, in recent years the number of news reports on incidents where corporal punishment has been administered severely to the extent of punished children requiring medical treatment has increased. Recent debates on child rights, child psychology and the general wellbeing of children has resulted in increased awareness among policy makers and the general public about CP. The present study offers useful insights into this problem by way of identifying teacher attitudes towards CP in such a way that the findings can be used in teacher training.

Subjects: Sociology; Law; Education; Social Psychology

Keywords: corporal punishment; physical punishment; teacher authority; traditional classroom; Sri Lankan Government schools

1. Introduction

Harsh or may be even “inhumane” levels of punishment by Sri Lankan school teachers and principals resulting in teenagers’ dropping out of school, psychological damage and even suicide has been highlighted in Sri Lankan media over the past 10–15 years. Corporal punishment (CP) of students is only one such “harsh” punishment that is still being administered in Sri Lankan schools in spite of it being a practice “unapproved” of by educational authorities. Section 2 of Circular No. 2005/17 issued by the Ministry of Education in 2005 states that CP should not be used in schools. However, this has not been confirmed in legislation as at 2011 (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2013; Lucas, 2014). After a careful analysis of the relevant sections of the Penal Code and circulars, Lucas (2014) concludes that “there seems to be some degree of apparent or perceived ambiguity and possible conflicts in the many documents, circulars and legislative pronouncements regarding corporal punishment in Sri Lanka.” This ambiguity is clearly responsible for the continued use of CP in schools in Sri Lanka.

Historically, CP has been administered in Sri Lankan schools for disciplining students and for promoting classroom learning (TRED Monthly Magazine, n.d.). There is still a high prevalence of it reported in media with over 1,000 complaints lodged in at the National Child Protection Authority in 2017 (De Moore, 2018; Narin, 2018). De Silva et al. (2017) claim that most teachers and principals still believe in the efficacy

of CP as a means of correcting student misbehavior. UNICEF (2018) produces evidence of many Sri Lankan children being subjected to CP at home and at institutional settings meant for the education and/or the welfare of children. The latter includes schools, preschools and day care centers. Children who are punished in this nature by school authorities are then likely to be similarly punished by parents and other family members. It is the “isolation” felt by these children that sometimes results in acts of self-harm (Mahanamahewa, 2014).

Mahanamahewa (2014) discusses a “traditional view” and a “Western approach” towards CP in Sri Lanka. The traditional view is based on a belief that the teachers mean well and that punishment for misconduct in school can in fact rectify a child’s mistakes and guide him/her towards a better future. The Western approach to CP is based on the UN convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that school discipline should be “administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity.”

In 2012, Karunaratne¹ & Chinthaka conducted a survey in order to develop an attitude test for testing teacher attitudes towards CP in schools. Teacher attitudes representing the traditional view and the Western approach towards CP were clearly identified in this study as well. Teachers who endorsed the traditional view believed that CP should be administered with the genuine intent of correcting student misconduct. Those who supported the Western approach were strictly against any kind of CP in school. However, the study revealed a need for more qualitative inquiry into the topic of CP prior to developing such an attitude test. The present study is a response to this 2012 study and makes a qualitative inquiry into the same subject with the purpose of understanding teacher attitudes towards CP in schools and their justifications for resorting to CP.

The paper attempts to answer the following research questions through the analysis of qualitative data generated through in-depth interviews.

- (1) Why do teachers feel/not feel the need to use CP in the classroom?
- (2) How do teachers justify their decision to use/not use CP in the classroom?

2. Methods and techniques of data collection

The data analyzed in the present paper was obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers purposively selected from the same sample used by Karunaratne and Chinthaka in 2012. Selecting the sample from the same group of teachers was essential because the present study was designed to further explore the views expressed by the group in 2012. Accordingly, 28 teachers from four government schools in Colombo were chosen for the study. One of the schools was a boys' school while the remainder were all coeducational schools. The coeducational schools belonged to the Type 2 category (Government schools with grades up to Year 11) while the boys' school was a national (a prestigious category of government schools with better human and physical resources) school (see Karunaratne, 2009, pp. 14–15 for a description of the school categories). The Type 2 schools had less than 25 teachers while the national school had over 150 teachers. Two of the Type 2 schools had a student population of less than 100 while the remaining school had between 101 to 500 students. The national school had more than 501 students.

In the 2012 study, Karunaratne and Chinthaka collected only quantitative data by means of a questionnaire. There was little opportunity (or space) given for teachers to express their views freely without having to restrict themselves to the statements/categories identified by the authors. The need for a deeper understanding of their views on CP was strongly felt. Consequently, the present qualitative study was planned as a means of obtaining teachers' independent views.

Highest ethical standards were ensured at all times during the research in spite of it not being a mandatory requirement for social science research in Sri Lanka. Written consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the objectives, methods and forms of dissemination of research findings to them. Voluntary participation by and convenience of the participants were given utmost importance at all times during the research.

The 28 teachers selected for the study were chosen based on teacher's availability and willingness to take part in the research. The interviews were conducted over the phone as none of the teachers were available for an interview during or after school hours. Understandably, taking part in a study of this nature during school hours was difficult for them due to their teaching responsibilities. They were unavailable even after school hours and during weekends due to their teaching assignments in various places. Thus, in spite of its limitations, the telephone interview was the only technique that could be effectively used. Prior appointments were made with teachers for the telephone interviews. Most appointments were after 8 p.m.; a clear indication of teachers' various engagements during weekday afternoons and weekends.

The researchers attempted to get a "mixed" sample by way of considering teachers' gender, qualifications and years of experience as a teacher (see Table 1). There were 10 male teachers and 18 female teachers in the sample.

The data was analyzed thematically according to the two research questions that guided the research.

The paper opens with a discussion on defining CP and literature relevant to the topic. Following the literature review will be the discussion of data gathered in the study and the paper will close with a summary and conclusion.

3. Understanding the role of CP in education

People's perceptions of what constitutes CP seem to change across time and across space. What is considered CP in one socio-cultural context may not be considered so in another. Likewise,

Table 1. The sample of teachers

Gender	Educational Qualifications	Years of Experience					Total
		≤5	6–10	11–15	16–20	≥21	
Male	BA/BEd/BSc	2	1			2	5
	MA						
	P'grad Dip		1				1
	College of Edu	1		1	1		3
	Trained			1			1
Female	BA/BEd/BSc		2		1		3
	MA		1				1
	P'grad Dip		1	1		1	3
	College of Edu				2	1	3
	Trained			1	1	6	8
Total		3	6	4	5	10	28

perceptions of what constitutes CP may change over time even within the same socio-cultural context. Taking this complex nature of CP into account, Straus and Donnelly (2005, pp. 3–4) put forward a definition of CP. According to them CP is,

the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correcting or controlling the child’s behavior. (2005, p. 3)

The distinction between “pain” and “injury” seems crucial as it enables the distinction between physical abuse and socially and legally accepted CP. Furthermore, the definition highlights the significance of the CP administrator’s “intent” which should be focused on causing pain to a child with the intention of correcting or controlling the child’s behavior.

Punishment of children is usually done to make a child refrain from undesirable behavior. However, many punishers including parents and teachers sometimes seem to mistakenly believe that punishment could teach a child to engage in desirable behavior. Based on this principle, behavioral clinicians point out that decreasing undesirable behavior (through CP) will be of no use if the child does not learn desirable behavior (Powers & Larzerele, 2005, pp. 97–98). Similarly, McCord (2005, pp. 165–169) argues that punishment in general is counterproductive in terms of teaching children the correct way to behave. She argues that punishment which is painful leads children to see that inflicting pain on others is fine. Social learning theory puts forward a similar argument (Rich, 1989, 2005). Further, McCord (2005) points out that punishments reduce the possibility of punishers being able to have an impact on children. For example, instead of rectifying behavior, the child may learn to “misbehave” in the absence of the punisher. McCord (2005) also claims that punishment makes the “punishable act” more attractive thereby making children want to do it. A further point emphasized here is that a punishment introduces alternatives for the action that is desired but forbidden. For example, if a child is told that he/she will not be taken to the movies if he engages in a certain act, the child could then make up his mind to engage in the activity anyway and then chose to watch television instead of going to the movies. This way, children may learn to care less about punishment or the pain that is induced by it and become immune to punishment. Consequently, punishment may become useless and ineffective. In conclusion, McCord (2005) says that punishments make the punished less altruist and more egocentric in later years. It is due to this reason that behavioral clinicians recommend more humane and mild (such as time out) punishments instead of CP (Powers & Larzerele, 2005, p. 98). Freud’s psycho-analysis too shows that CP on children can create individuals who are insensitive towards animals and humans (Rich, 2005, p. 176). In fact it has been pointed out and proved through research that CP can actually contribute towards increased aggression in children and in their later life (Bitensky,

2006; Straus & Donnelly, 1994). Social learning theory also points out similar tendencies in children who are subjected to CP (Rich, 2005).

Lay punishers, such as parents and teachers who administer CP seem to possess many beliefs and attitudes that justify their actions. The significance of these “lay theories” in understanding CP have been highlighted by Furnham (2005). According to Furnham (2005, p. 138) lay arguments in favor of punishment is threefold, namely (1) it is an effective way of eliminating undesirable behavior in the presence of alternative behaviors that are rewarded, (2) avoiding a threatened punishment is itself a reward as it helps reduce anxiety and (3) punishment is informative because it provides useful feedback on behavior. The current research may also be considered an attempt to explore the “lay” theories possessed by teachers about CP and its impact on children. In fact the previous study conducted by Karunaratne and Chinthaka (2012) revealed several hints about such theories highlighting the need for a more in-depth inquiry into the subject.

Over the years, many researchers have shown several negative impacts of CP on children (see Gorogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2007). In his 1991 study, Straus concluded that although CP is able to gain conformity in the immediate situation, in the long run it increases the tendency of deviance, including delinquency in adolescence and violent behavior as an adult. Furnham (2005, p. 146) also points out several undesirable side effects of administering CP in schools. These include, blocking of further communication, alienation of child from school and education, breaking up the good human relation between teacher and student, setting a bad example of successful violent behavior and risk of introducing sadomasochistic element into the relationship. In addition to these negative impacts, research has also shown that children subjected to CP are likely to perform poorly on cognitive tasks, have increased stress levels that can increase risk of long term mental health problems and likely to physically punish their own children as parents (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010).

Bitensky (2006, pp. 2–3) points out that CP has no lasting good and that there are more effective ways of changing children’s misbehavior such as timeout and grounding. She claims that “corporal punishment is, if anything, more a device that serves the short-term needs of care givers, allowing adults to let off steam, to get a moments respite from a child’s trying misconduct, or to savor the ego-gratifying illusion that they are in control” (Bitensky, 2006, p. 2). Straus and Donnelly (1994) too identify CP as a “socially patterned behavior” in which parents engage because they are angry and out of control. They claim that the child’s misbehavior has little to do with the punishment and that it is mostly a stress release vent for the parent.

Straus and Donnelly (1994, pp. 178–184) however claims that the prevalence of CP in American society has been rapidly dropping since the late twentieth century as a result of three influences, namely (1) the expansion of human rights and humanitarian values, (2) the development of a post-industrial economic system and (3) the growth of social scientific knowledge and the idea that social policies and services should be based on that knowledge. These processes lie behind what has been identified as the Western/modern approach towards CP by Karunaratne and Chinthaka (2012) and Mahanamahewa (2014). These processes have undoubtedly brought in ideas of human/children’s rights, child psychology, personal independence, self-dignity, etc., which are directly related to CP. These “modern” ideas have transformed traditional Sri Lankan views of teacher-student relationship and punishment in general and CP in particular. The current study is undertaken in the backdrop of this rapidly changing socio-cultural scenario to explore in-depth the continuum of teacher attitudes regarding CP (which has traditional and modern views at the two extremes) that were discussed by Karunaratne and Chinthaka in 2012.

In Sri Lankan schools, teacher attitudes toward punishment have a lot to do with the authority that is enjoyed by teachers in the classroom and in the school. Classrooms are essentially

structured according to traditional standards where the teacher does most of the talking from in front of the class and takes most or all of the important classroom decisions. The process automatically transforms students into very passive learners (Karunaratne, 2009; Karunaratne, Nissanka, & Chinthaka, 2012). Karunaratne and Chinthaka (2012) found that 90% of the entire sample (including those who held anti-CP attitudes) has administered some form of CP on their students sometime during their career. Their anti-CP attitudes were largely related to physical punishment that caused injury to the child. Hitting a child without causing any injury and without hatred was acceptable to a majority. The psychological harm caused to children who are victims of CP did not seem relevant or important to a majority of these teachers. The current study is an attempt to understand these attitudes in detail.

4. Data analysis

Similar to what was observed by Karunaratne and Chinthaka (2012), it was difficult to identify a purely pro-CP or purely anti-CP attitude among the teachers who participated in the present study. Both groups were neither fully supportive of CP nor fully against CP. It was mostly a case of what they believed to be good classroom behavior, discipline in the classroom and the means of achieving it.

None of the teachers in the sample explicitly said that they support the administration of CP on students. The pro-CP attitude is a more subtle expression of a desire to be able to administer CP on students without feeling guilty about it at times when nothing else worked. The guilt is generated by the “Western/modern” approach to CP that is endorsed by authorities in the Ministry of Education. They had developed personal justifications for using CP as a means of freeing themselves from this “guilt.”

Of the 28 teachers in the sample, an overwhelming majority (24) said that they administer CP on their students for maintaining classroom discipline and for “controlling” students. Teachers used CP as a “desperate” measure when nothing else was effective for gaining student compliance. A minority of this group used it only to “scare” the students and thereby gain compliance. However, they too resorted to actually administering CP when scaring alone became ineffective.

The results of the study are presented below according to the two research questions that guided the research, namely the reasons for resorting to CP and the justifications presented by teachers for using it.

4.1. Reasons for resorting to CP

Mr. Perera,² a teacher with 22 years of experience was one teacher who believed that CP should be available for teachers as a “desperate” measure for “controlling” students on whom none of the other disciplinary measures worked.

I don't hit my own children. I don't approve of it... But if a child continues to be aggressive what else can you do? ...What can a teacher do if a child is disregarding his/her advice and continues to misbehave?³ (Perera, Sinhala Literature & Language teacher, Coeducational school)

Likewise, Rathna, an English teacher with 25 years of experience said that “teachers sometimes become helpless and unable to control students. At such times hitting them seems to be the only solution.” These and similar statements by other teachers were clearly a “call for help.” These teachers seem to realize that they need help and support to overcome difficult classroom situations during which they currently resort to CP. In fact about 95% of the sample said that teachers must be educated and made aware of how they can handle such classroom situations in order to resolve the problem of “inhumane” CP (i.e. brutal beating causing physical and mental harm to children) in schools.

All teachers who believed that CP is necessary for disciplining students, however, believed that students had a right to be free of CP. They were definitely aware of and concerned about the

twentieth century processes discussed by Straus and Donnelly (1994). This awareness was a source of guilt which was expressed by many in terms of “I know it’s bad. But...” attitude. Their concern was about misbehaving students disrupting the class and violating teachers’ rights to engage in their job without any distractions and the rights of other children who were constantly disturbed. Therefore, teachers believed that they had to use “whatever method” in order to get them involved in classroom work and interested in studies eventually.

All teachers in the sample including the ones categorized as pro-CP considered injury-causing CP as inhumane or brutal punishments. The pro-CP attitude had ideas of severity of CP built into it. Karunaratne and Chinthaka (2012) concluded that teachers took issue not with the idea of CP per se but with the severity in which it is administered. Prasad, a relatively new teacher with only one year experience said “They should not be punished in ways that they begin to dislike education. A slight punishment is enough. For example if students are disturbing the lesson, they should be asked to stand up for about 10 min. A normal punishment like that does not traumatize them.” Some teachers said that hitting with the cane is fine and not with the hand while some others approved the opposite. Some said that children should not be hit on the palm or any other part of the body above waist, while some said it should be used to spank or to pretend spanking by hitting the skirt or trouser edge.

The anti-CP attitude was clearly influenced by the three twentieth century processes described by Straus and Donnelly (1994), namely the expansion of humanitarian values, post-industrial economic system and social scientific knowledge, particularly in the area of child psychology. Teachers with this attitude were on principle against the administration of CP on students and believed that there were other milder and more effective means of disciplining students. But they were clearly a minority among the teachers in all the schools studied. Some teachers representing the anti-CP attitude even used CP on students.

It was discovered that being anti-CP did not necessarily mean that teachers completely refrained from using CP on their students. Even teachers representing the anti-CP attitude used CP on students. With regard to many teachers, being anti-CP was merely an expression of their beliefs about child rights, child psychology and student wellbeing. It was not an expression of their ethical classroom conduct. For example, Rathna who said that she administers CP on her students further said “I am against all forms of punishment. But we cannot manage without it. Children in our school seem a little too relaxed and don’t seem to be taking their studies seriously. CP can help in this situation.”

Malini’s attitudes were identified as typical of anti-CP attitudes. She claims she has never used CP during her career as a teacher.

The impact of CP is temporary. You can get immediate compliance and get what you want done. I don’t hit children. I am a teacher who is always close to the students. I am always with them. I am a mother to them. . . Even if I am faced with issues where I feel like punishing children, I grit my teeth and find a softer solution. Even if another teacher punishes children, I will always see how I can intervene and save a child. Sometimes teachers and principals criticize me for this. But I love my students and go to school for them. (Malini, English teacher, Coeducational School)

Thilak is another teacher who expressed anti-CP attitudes with respect to certain kinds of CP. But he uses CP on his students.

I do not approve of how some teachers use CP on children. There is a way in which the cane should be used. I do not approve of making students kneel down for several hours. That will have a negative impact on the child’s confidence. A teacher must react spontaneously when a child misbehaves and advice the child. I teach children in Grade 7 to 11. Grade 9 children are difficult to control. Other children will listen if you talk to them kindly but Grade 9 children will get scared only if they see the cane. (Thilak, Art teacher, National school)

This is the line of thought that was more prevalent among those categorized as anti-CP during this study. It is clear that only a fine line divides the two types of attitudes identified here.

Tharu, a teacher with 20 years of experience said that she gave “normal” punishments to her students and added that she considered them as her own children.

My son once told me to stay at home and help him with his studies for the upcoming term test. I told him that he is only one child, but there are 52 children waiting for me in school and all 52 will be wasting time if I don't go. (Tharu, Primary teacher, National school)

It is this sense of care, intimacy and sensitivity that made anti-CP teachers sound different to those who used CP to “scare” or discipline students in the classroom.

Both pro-CP and anti-CP attitudes confirm that classroom discipline is the key reason that pushes teachers towards using CP in class.

4.2. Justifications for using CP

Teachers who use CP have also developed their reasons or justifications for doing so. These justifications are related to their own experiences as students, religious teachings, professional responsibility and associated stress, their lay theories of suitable child raising practices and their knowledge of child psychology. 23 teachers in the sample have been subjected to some form of physical punishment by teachers when they were schooling. All these teachers believed that this experience has had a positive impact on their later life. Thilak and Wijaya are graduate teachers who have been subjected to CP as students.

Oh! I have got beaten by teachers couple of times... I was also asked to step down from my position as a school prefect. I think it is good that I got punished... The punishment made me realize the mistake and correct myself. I never got punished in later years during my A/ Ls.⁴ I did well in my education and came this far. I think the punishment has done me good. (Thilak, Art teacher, National school)

I have got caned along with another group of students for missing classes. But later all of us who got beaten that day entered university and did well in life. I always think that I wouldn't be where I am today if not for those punishments. (Wijaya, History teacher, National school)

Thilak, Wijaya and many others seem to have corrected their behavior because of punishment. Those who have been subjected to CP seem to have developed beliefs about the benefits of CP. Moreover, they feel a sense of “loyalty” towards how they were raised by their teachers.

Influence of religious teachings on teachers' disciplinary practices involving CP was very clearly expressed by a the Buddhist monk.

Lord Buddha has not said that punishment is bad. (Explains the content of one *Sutta* in Buddhism.) Of course, Buddhism doesn't preach mental or physical harm to anyone. Lord Buddha has said that *brahmadandanaya* (a form of timeout) is the most effective form of punishment. Students must be punished without the mental stress. I am against causing mental stress to the students. Punishment should be purely for the purpose of rectifying misbehavior and if you hit a child you must hit without hatred and anger. Your actions should be for rectifying behavior and that only. (Rev. Punyasara, Buddhism teacher, National School)

This idea about administering CP without anger and hatred towards the students and with the intent of rectifying behavior or of showing the child that he/she has made a mistake was expressed by several teachers in the sample. Perera also presented religious justifications for his beliefs of CP.

Our country is a Buddhist country. Buddhism doesn't say that punishment is bad. If that was the case how can the Sri Lankan legal system imprison people for several years with hard labor. (Perera, Sinhala Literature and Language teacher, Coeducational school)

The most commonly heard justification was related to the professional responsibilities of teachers and associated stress levels. Several teachers pointed out that teachers are over burdened with the responsibility of covering the syllabi and that it becomes an even more difficult task if they do not have attentive students in the classroom. The situation is worse in the case of the teachers from the National school as they have 45–50 students in a class where 35 would be an ideal number. Upper school teachers who only had one or two periods per day with each student said that inadequacy of “contact time” made it very difficult for them to educate students about good behavior and therefore resorted to CP as an easier means of disciplining a class during the short period they spent with students. Some teachers also said that numerous other factors such as personal issues with regard to low income levels, stress of educating one's own children and family problems added to this stress and CP became a means of stress release for such teachers.

All teachers in the sample were parents or were expecting their first child. As a result, they had their own perceptions of good parenting practices based on their knowledge of child psychology.

You cannot handle children these days without punishments. You must at least have a sharp tongue and a loud voice. ‘Come baby, come son’ kind of sweet language doesn't work on these children. (Ranil, Commerce teacher, Coeducational school)

Some teachers believed that disciplining students by way of CP was an effective alternative for the inadequacies in their genetic make-up and/or the home environment. Teachers from all co-educational schools and some teachers from the national school described the difficulty of teaching children from home backgrounds where parental education levels were low. There are several shanty communities located close to the sample schools and many such children get admitted to these schools based on their residence (i.e. those living within a 5 km radius of a school will qualify for entrance) (Ministry of Education, 2013). Perera, went to the extent of saying that these children were of a lower standard genetically.

I once taught Buddhism to two children of a Professor. Their mother was a medical doctor and eldest sister was a medical student... They leaned very well and got two distinction passes. I learnt that genes were more important than environment... When we complain to parents about misbehaving children, parents tell us that they too can't control these children... Punishments become necessary depending on children's social environment... Children of educated parents will understand when you tell them something. (Perera, Sinhala Literature and Language teacher, Coeducational school)

5. Discussion and conclusion

The pro-CP and anti-CP attitudes were clearly visible among the teachers as found by Karunaratne and Chinthaka (2012). Teachers in both categories, except for four teachers in the anti-CP category, engaged in CP for maintaining classroom discipline. As mentioned earlier, being anti-CP did not necessarily mean that such teachers completely refrained from using CP in their classrooms. Anti-CP teachers seemed more concerned about child rights, child psychology and paid more attention to their students. When administering CP, they seemed to do so with greater understanding of their students' qualities and needs. The pro-CP teachers on the other hand resorted to CP as a “desperate” measure when all other disciplinary strategies had failed. All the teachers in the sample agreed that children have a right to be protected against CP but many noted that rights have to be defined not according to the Western standards but according to the needs of Sri Lankan children. As defined by Straus and Donnelly (2005), all teachers in the sample believed that CP should be used for rectifying classroom misconduct and not for injuring students. They were all against injury-

causing CP and considered such CP to be brutal/inhumane. Teachers were very clear that it had to be only “physical pain” and no “injury.” Such kind of inhumane CP was seen as a problem with teachers’ personalities.

The strongest reason for administering CP was the difficulty of dealing with classroom situations in which students misbehaved. CP was identified as a quick and an effective means of controlling such students when all other softer approaches failed. This clearly emphasised the need to train and educate teachers on these aspects of classroom management (TRED Monthly Magazine, n.d.). In fact, the teachers themselves highlighted the need for better training for teachers.

The stress of having to complete a syllabus while managing large class sizes was also identified as a reason for resorting to CP. The same factors have been identified by Karunaratne (2009) and De Silva et al. (2017) as contributing to the high stress levels experienced by teachers which may force them towards using CP. Here, administration of CP is clearly acting as a stress release vent for teachers (Bitensky, 2006; Straus & Donnelly, 1994).

In spite of their beliefs about the benefits of CP, concerns about child rights and legal provisions against CP in schools seemed to make teachers feel guilty about using CP on their students. Therefore, teachers had developed justifications for using CP in the classroom based on their personal childhood experiences, religious teachings, professional and personal stress levels, and beliefs about good child raising practices. A combination of their knowledge of child psychology and good child raising practices formed teachers’ “lay theories” of using CP on students. These “lay theories” spoke of how, when and on whom CP should be used in school. For example, some children in the sample schools came from low socio-economic backgrounds. According to the teachers, educating these children was a bigger task than educating children from other social class backgrounds. Teachers had to do more than academic teaching for these children who had serious socializing issues. CP became necessary for classroom discipline in order to ensure at least some amount of classroom learning in the case of such students.

The strongest justification for administering CP on students was related to teachers' personal experiences as students. Many teachers had been subjected to CP in school as children or adolescents and they believed that CP has benefitted them in later years. This sense of loyalty to how they were treated by their teachers played a key role in the pro-CP attitude. In a discussion of classroom teaching practices, Karunaratne (2009) points out how Sri Lankan teachers are influenced by their teachers’ teaching approaches. The same argument seems relevant here. As discussed by McCord (2005), this could also be a case of children learning that inflicting pain on others is fine as a result of being subjected to CP during their childhood.

These justifications are clearly an attempt to overcome the guilt felt by teachers who engage in CP. While administering CP can be seen as a stress release mechanism adopted by teachers faced with difficult classroom situations, these justifications perform the same function for teachers who feel stressed about administering CP on their students. The very act teachers engage in as a means of lowering their stress levels seems to become the source of more stress. It is evident that teachers need more training and/orcounselling to break free from this vicious cycle. External interventions in the areas of teacher training, recruitment and teacher’s psychological wellbeing seems essential to overcome this situation.

The study revealed few important policy implications based on views expressed by teachers. All teachers agreed that legal provisions alone would not be adequate for dealing with the issue of CP (particularly inhumane beating) in schools. Firstly, it is recommended that teachers be tested not only for academic qualifications but also for mental stability before recruitment. Secondly, teachers must be trained in child psychology and given an understanding about how to manage “difficult” students in the classroom and maintain classroom discipline without resorting to CP.

Thirdly, it is recommended that some kind of special attention be given to children of lower socio-economic stature as there is a need for educating them in more than academic subjects.

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Notes

1. Lakshman (alias Karunaratne), IM.
2. Person names are all fictitious.
3. The interviews were conducted in Sinhala and the responses have been translated to English in this paper.
4. General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) is a National examination taken after 13 years of schooling. It is also the University Entrance examination.

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