

Children's Perceptions of **Physical Punishment** in Ghana



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BIOGRAPHY

Afua Twum-Danso is a lecturer in the sociology of childhood at the University of Sheffield (UK). She holds a PhD from the Centre of West African Studies at the University of Birmingham (UK). Her thesis was entitled: 'Searching for a Middle ground in Children's Rights: the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ghana'. Since completing her PhD her research has focused on the changing nature of parent-child relationships; the impact of cultural values such as reciprocity, respect and responsibility on universal children's rights standards; and the impact of globalization on the concept of childhood. Her most recent research project aimed to elicit children's perceptions of physical punishment in Ghana, which was funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Her work has been published in a number of edited collections as well as in peer-reviewed journals such as the *International Journal of Children's Rights*, *Children's Geographies* and the *Journal for the History of Childhood and Youth*. She is also the editor of *Childhoods Today*, an e-journal for postgraduate students produced by the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth based at the University of Sheffield.

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

In recent years, a worldwide campaign to end the physical punishment of children around the world has gained momentum. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 by the UN General Assembly and now ratified by all countries except two (the USA and Somalia), has contributed to building this momentum. For example, Article 19 of the Convention stipulates that:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child (the United Nations, 1989).

In addition, in the years since its adoption, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which was established to monitor the implementation of the Convention by governments that have ratified it, has recommended the prohibition of all physical punishment of children including within the family, and has suggested campaigns to encourage the development of positive, non-violent child-rearing and educational practices (Hindberg, 2001). As a result, the Committee organised two days of general discussion on state violence against children (in 2000) and violence against children in school (in 2001), which led the UN General Assembly to launch a study on violence against children in 2001. The study, which was conducted over a period of five years, included, in its final recommendations, a call for the prohibition of physical punishment in all spheres of children's lives including in the home by the year 2009.

Furthermore, numerous campaigns calling for full prohibition of the physical punishment of children have emerged at the national, regional and international levels – largely influenced by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Violence study. For example, the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children was established in 2001 for the purpose of campaigning for the worldwide prohibition of all physical punishment of children within the school and the home. In addition, NGOs have played a significant role in exporting the 'end physical punishment of children' message to various countries around the world. For example, Save the Children, an organisation that takes a rights-based approach to all its programming, seeks to end all physical punishment of children due to its belief that as rights-holders, children, like adults, are entitled to have their human dignity and physical integrity respected (International Save the Children's Alliance, 2003). Thus, around the world the organisation adopts a strategy which not only involves working with educationalists to end physical punishment in schools, but also working with communities to highlight the importance of respecting children and preventing violence aimed at this group (Ibid). As a result of what may be called a 'wind of change' in

attitudes, the physical punishment of children in all spheres of their lives has been prohibited in full in 26 countries, mostly in the wake of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹

However, there remain communities that continue to administer physical punishment as part of the child-rearing process and strongly adhere to it in different parts of the world, including in the Global North. In fact, studies have shown that in societies around the world physical punishment is a key component of the childrearing process (see Levinson, 1989; Bartholdson, 2001; Ember and Ember, 2005; Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006). As Montgomery (2009:161) argues, in societies where physical punishment is used, it is not perceived as simply a method of punishment, but rather, as being linked to 'wider philosophies of socialization and ideas about the correct relationship between people'. For example, in Turkey families sought to produce children who were obedient and compliant rather than independent or autonomous and in order to ensure this, physical punishment was employed as one way of achieving this compliance (Erkman and Rohner, 2006: 252). Furthermore, Kavapalu (1993: 317), in her study of the Tonga, asserts that physical punishment, which was sometimes severe in that society, was not 'a random act of violence or cruelty', but was rather associated with wider ideas about the nature of childhood and the necessity of shaping children in a particular way. She adds that 'the ideology and practice of child punishment is embedded within a more general theory of personhood and development'. Within this context, then, socialization was perceived as a process aimed at producing someone who was 'good', 'nice', 'proper' and 'appropriate'. These qualities were seen as being necessary for the child to become clever, capable and socially competent, which was, traditionally, the central aim of Tongan socialisation (Kavapalu, 1993). As a result of the importance of producing the 'proper person', a great deal of emphasis was placed on teaching children correct values and behaviour and physical punishment was regarded as the most effective teaching method (Ibid).

Similarly to Tonga and Turkey, the socialization of children in many African societies is centred on training children to become honest, humble, respectful, obedient, well-behaved and self-disciplined members of their societies. Gyekye (1996: 85) explains it thus:

African parents, like parents in all other societies, want their children to develop good character traits, to grow and become worthy, respectful and respectable adults and responsible citizens. Character development, accordingly, is an important aspect of the upbringing of children. In this connection, efforts are constantly made to instruct children in the values of the society to help them acquire the virtues that a person should possess in order to live a most satisfactory life.

The importance of such values in socialization has also emerged in other studies focusing on socialization and child rearing in Africa. For example, with regards to respect, a key value in societies across the continent, LeVine and LeVine (1963) argue that the concept of intelligence amongst the Nyansongo of Kenya in the early 1960s, included respect for elders and filial piety, which were critical ingredients in the socialization process. More recently, in his work on education

¹These countries include Luxembourg (2008), Republic of Moldova (2008), Costa Rica (2008), Spain (2007), Venezuela (2007), Uruguay (2007), Portugal (2007), New Zealand (2007), Netherlands (2007), Greece (2006), Hungary (2004), Romania (2004), Ukraine (2003), Iceland (2003), Bulgaria (2003), Germany (2000), Israel (2000), Croatia (1998), Latvia (1998), Denmark (1997) and Cyprus (1994).

in Zambia, Serpell (1993) claims that young people themselves considered respectfulness and compassion as more important than trustworthiness, cooperativeness or intelligence. As a result of the stress placed on these values within this social and cultural context, no effort is spared in ensuring that they are instilled in children from an early age and physical correction is seen as an important tool which helps to achieve this. According to Omari and Mbilinyi (1997), the physical punishment of children is an 'old and upheld custom', which ensures that they obey instructions and respect their elders. This is based on 'the belief that good character is built by evoking fear thus whipping achieves that objective' (Ibid: 48). Therefore, children are physically disciplined for a range of misdemeanours such as failure in learning (Nsamenang, 1992), disobedience and being disrespectful to adults.

While there has been a great deal of literature on the physical punishment of children, relatively very little has taken into account children's own views. Therefore, little is known about children's perceptions of their own experiences of physical punishment (Gershoff, 2002). This is particularly so for children in non-Western societies where Montgomery (2009) asserts that despite the abundance of anthropological studies on child-rearing, very few have focused on children's own feelings and reactions to disciplinary measures. Therefore, although much of the literature on child-rearing in Africa points to the fact that not only are parents expected to physically punish their children, but that children are also expected to submit to such punishment (see Jahoda, 1982 in Nsamenang, 1992), little empirical work has been conducted to support this. This presents a gap in our understanding which needs to be addressed, especially in the wake of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as many of these perspectives are now being subjected to closer scrutiny and questioning. This increased scrutiny requires a response from local communities about the role of physical punishment within their social contexts. Critical to this response is the need to foreground children's own perspectives and reactions to physical punishment.

Aim and Scope

Therefore, the primary aim of this research project was to explore the extent to which children in Ghana, the first country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in February 1990, accept their role in society to be disciplined by the various adults in their lives – biological parents, relatives, foster parents/guardians, step-parents and teachers. The project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation in the UK, was undertaken over a period of one year, between August 2009 and August 2010. The focus was on school-going children, aged between 10 and 16, attending public schools in rural and urban areas in the Greater Accra (Bukom and Nima) and Eastern regions (Dodowa and Pokrom Nsaba) of Ghana. This rural vs. urban dichotomy was important because of the widely-held belief that families in rural societies tend to use physical punishment much more frequently as a way of enforcing obedience than those in urban areas (see Timyan, 1988). Further, I sought to explore whether children of professional parents who had been educated to, at least degree level, had a different experience of physical punishment and child-rearing more generally. Therefore, the study incorporated children from a private school in an affluent area of Accra, the capital city.

The central questions that guided the research were as follows:

- What are children's own views on the physical correction to which they are subjected in different spheres of their lives?
- To what extent do the attitudes and reactions of children to physical correction vary depending on the person who is punishing them -biological parents vs. other members of the extended family and teachers?
- To what extent do children see this method of punishment as part of the socialization process?

While the primary purpose of the research was to elicit children's perceptions, it was important to incorporate adults such as parents and teachers into the study in order to develop a deeper understanding of the context within which physical correction occurs as part of the socialization process. Specifically, the proposed study sought to understand from this group of adults the reasons and justifications used for the physical correction of children, the methods of punishment used and why, as well as the systems that exist within communities to monitor punishment and intervene when it becomes excessive.

Methods

The research was situated within the paradigm of the sociology of childhood, which is now widely accepted in the social sciences. This paradigm, promoted by James and Prout (1997), Jenks (1996), Corsaro (1997), amongst others, moves away from previous approaches to childhood and instead, takes the view that children are actors who are active in constructing and reconstructing childhood and negotiating the boundaries. They are not passive recipients of a childhood created by adults and structures in society and imposed on them by those who are more powerful in society – be they adults in their families and communities or policy makers in official capacities. Therefore, following on from this paradigm, the research assumed that children are social actors whose perspectives about their lives and experiences are invaluable for understanding the reality in which they live. To this end, I focused on fieldwork methods that enabled children to have a more direct voice in the research and allowed me to foreground their perceptions.

Firstly, observation was undertaken in one urban community –Bukom- where I was able to observe adult-child interactions, talk to both adults and children in the community as they went about their daily business – fetching water, selling fish, cooking food or playing in the square outside Freeman's Memorial chapel. This enabled me to gain an overall impression of social interactions between adults and children, the attitudes of adults towards children and the position of children within these communities, as well as gain insights into how and why children were punished within this community.

Secondly, 22 interviews were conducted with 23 children in total (10 in Bukom, six in Pokrom Nsaba and six in Dodowa). Interviews were not conducted in Nima due to lack of time. Of the 23 interviews that were conducted, 13 were with girls, eight with boys and one joint interview with siblings (male and female). Participants were aged between 10 and 16, with the average age being 13. The purpose of the interviews was to collect their views of, and reactions to, the physical correction they experience in different spheres of their lives.

Thirdly, as it was difficult to access children in private schools for in-depth interviews, I decided to use diaries with this group, which like the interviews, also sought to obtain their views and experiences of the physical correction they experience in different spheres of their lives. In total 10 diaries were returned. Of these five were completed by boys and five by girls aged between 11 and 14, with the median age being 13.

Fourthly, as quantitative methods continue to be the primary method of data collection within the Ghanaian academic and policy sector, I sought to administer 200 questionnaires to children in private schools as well as in each of the four participating communities – Nima, Bukom, Pokrom Nsaba and Dodowa. I hoped using a quantitative method would ensure that my research would also be credible within this social context. Furthermore, the inclusion of this method allowed me to corroborate issues raised in interviews. This notwithstanding, it is important to understand that data collected using this method was not based on statistical sampling and thus, is not representative. As a result, it can only be subject to qualitative interpretation.

Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 158 were completed and returned. As can be seen from Table 1 the majority of respondents (52.5%) to the questionnaire were male.

Table 1: Gender of Respondent

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1 Female	75	47.5
	2 Male	83	52.5
	Total	158	100.0

While the target group for the research project was children aged between 10 and 16, during the data collection process fieldworkers were able to gain access to those outside the age range and took the opportunity to include this group in order to broaden the range of responses. Thus, 7.0% of respondents were aged between 7 and 10. The same proportion was over the age of 16. However, the majority of respondents (54.4%) were aged between the ages of 14 and 16 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1 7-10	11	7.0
	2 11-13	50	31.6
	3 14-16	86	54.4
	4 Over 16	11	7.0
	Total	158	100.00

As Table 3 illustrates the majority of children (48.1%) were from inner city public schools (in Nima and in Central Accra which is near Bukom). Due to difficulty in negotiating access to private school pupils, only 20 were able to respond to the survey from one school and it must be acknowledged that not all of these respondents were Ghanaian.

Table 3: Type of School of Respondent

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Private School Pupils	20	12.7
	2.Inner City Public School Pupils	76	48.1
	3.Rural Public School Pupils	62	39.2
	Total	158	100.00

As the research sought to gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which physical correction is part of the socialization process, data was also collected from key agents of the socialization process such as parents, extended family members and teachers. Thus, 11 focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 118 adults were conducted. Most were women and all were parents or grandparents

of children under the age of 18. In the inner city urban communities three FGDs took place in Bukom with 32 adults, mainly women who were petty traders, beauticians/hairdressers, manual workers or unemployed. Two FGDs took place in Nima with 31 parents, again, mainly women who were housewives or petty traders. In the participating rural communities, two FGDs were undertaken with 28 adults in Dodowa and one FGD with 18 people took place in Pokrom Nsaba. Again, the majority were women who were hairdressers, petty traders, or farmers. In addition one FGD with six teachers, mostly men, was held in a cluster of schools in Mamprobi, a suburb of Accra. As the study also sought to explore distinctions and differences in attitudes to physical punishment and child-rearing practices based on class and education, I sought to extend the research to professionals who had been educated to at least first degree level. To this end I managed to hold two FGDs with medical professionals at one of the main teaching hospitals in Ghana. The first FGD was held with five female doctors, all of whom were mothers of children under the age of 8. The second was with eight microbiologists, most of whom were men. However, organising subsequent FGDs with such professionals proved very difficult. Therefore, I decided to conduct an online survey to obtain more responses from this group. However as the survey was supposed to supplement the data collected in FGDs, many of the questions were open-ended which discouraged some people from completing it. Therefore, while 27 embarked on the survey, only 13 managed to complete it.

Furthermore, elite-level interviews were conducted with government officials from key agencies working in areas relating to the subject matter: - the Ghana National Commission on Children (now known as the Department of Children), which is part of the Ministry of Women and Children; the Department of Social Welfare, part of the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment; Ghana Educational Services, an agency of the Ministry of Education; and the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service. In addition, I was able to hold an informal conversation with Ms. Sheema Gupta, the Chief of the Child Protection section of UNICEF-Ghana. These interviews aimed to explore the steps taken, if any, to introduce and enforce laws to regulate or ban physical discipline as a method of punishment within the home and in schools, the rationale behind these initiatives, and the challenges such agencies face in carrying out their mandate.

While three fieldworkers fluent in the languages relevant to the communities – Ga, Twi and Hausa - were recruited to administer questionnaires and conduct interviews, I facilitated all FGDs with adults with the support of fieldworkers, selected children for all interviews, conducted some interviews with children and all elite-level interviews. All FGDs and interviews were recorded and transcribed as needed. Data, including field notes, were coded by time, place and people involved. Data from interviews, diaries and adult FGDs were grouped together according to the themes identified. SPSS was used to analyse the small sample of questionnaires administered to children.

Ethical Reflections

As a study situated within child participatory principles and focusing primarily on eliciting the views of children, ethical considerations were central to the research process. In order to ensure that the research did not take advantage of, exploit, or harm children in any way, I took into account several ethical factors as I developed my methodological framework prior to conducting fieldwork in Ghana.

Firstly, standard ethical procedures were met. The project was ethically approved through the University of Sheffield's research ethics procedures. Furthermore, in Ghana, consent was sought from local community leaders prior to commencing the research, as well as from school authorities. I felt that it was particularly important to obtain the consent and support of community leaders because of the importance of local communities in the lives of children. This decision was based on my belief that by involving them, I would be better able to access both adults and children for FGDs and interviews. Also, I did not want to be seen as disrespectful by bypassing the leadership of the community and approaching children and young people directly (see Aye, 2003). While I sought to obtain consent from parents, in some communities it was not possible. For example in Bukom, despite several attempts to obtain consent from parents before conducting interviews with children, I was informed that this approach would not work because, as parents do not look after their children, they have little control over what their children consent to. Thus, I was advised to deal directly with children themselves.

Secondly, in hierarchical cultures such as Ghana, where children are spoken to last, if at all, research studies focusing only on eliciting the views of children are at risk of being challenged by adults within the communities who wonder why the research is focusing on children when their own voices and needs have never been heard (Mann and Tolfree, 2003). As a result, I felt that it was important that the research also included adults, especially as they have the most impact on the daily lives of children. This approach worked well, as by conducting FGDs with adults as well as children, it was also possible to validate the research and appease adults within the communities to which children belonged (Ibid). Therefore, not only did this approach enable me to take into consideration an important ethical factor, but it was also effective as no one in the focus communities questioned or criticised me for only focusing on children's views. Adults who saw me talking to children understood that I would also talk to them on another occasion.

Thirdly, central to the development of my methodological framework was the need to address power imbalances between researchers and children in projects, which is due to the subordinate position of children in most societies. Therefore, while I relied on community leaders to introduce me to children who were eligible to participate in the study, I tried to ensure that children were able to volunteer and opt out of the research. Firstly, I provided them with information about the project, its rationale, its aims and its expected outcomes, the way the data they provided will be used and stored, and how their confidentiality will be guaranteed. I further explained that if they chose to volunteer they could opt out at any time.

Following this all children were happy to volunteer and in instances where too many children volunteered, we randomly selected participants for the interview. Everyone present at these initial informational sessions was compensated with groceries or refreshments, whether or not they were selected for interviews.

Fourthly, due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the possibility that some of the children may disclose abuse at the hands of parents or other adults, prior to embarking on the research I approached the Ark Foundation, a human rights non-governmental organisation in Accra, which seeks to protect and promote the rights of women and children. It not only does this through advocacy, but it also provides direct services to women and children fleeing from abuse, including accommodation in a discrete location outside Accra, a free hotline number and free legal advice. The organisation agreed to provide me with leaflets to distribute to children, especially those who disclosed abuse during interviews. Furthermore, they gave me some posters on child abuse and domestic violence that I distributed to adults after the completion of FGDs in each community. In the end, while we gave leaflets to all children who participated in the interviews, there were only two instances when we really felt the need to hand them out. One case involved a girl whose mother had previously burnt her stomach with an iron and thrown a stone at her eye, leaving her in need of glasses. However, she refused to take the leaflet, explaining that it was not necessary as her mother had not beaten her for two years. The other case involved a girl who had been orphaned at a young age and now lived with her grandmother. Although she was never physically punished by anybody at home, we felt the need to inform her of Ark Foundation's services as she appeared distraught, mainly because it appeared that she was overlooked by all in her family and had a number of financial difficulties. Interviews were conducted in as private a place as possible – a room in the back of the church, the verandah of a town hall on a Saturday morning when it was quiet, and a secluded area of a school yard. Furthermore, in order to protect children special care has been taken, within this report, to ensure that the comments and experiences of children cannot be traced back to them. To this end, all names of children have been changed in order to ensure they cannot be identified. Moreover, while data from interviews were collated according to time and place, these have been removed in order to further ensure the confidentiality of child participants.

Structure

This report has been structured in such a way as to highlight the prevalence of physical punishment in the communities of focus and explain the reasons behind the prevalence by exploring, not only adult perceptions, but also foregrounding children's perceptions. To this end, Chapter 1 sets the context by providing a situational analysis of the physical punishment of children in Ghana using data collected from both adults and children. To understand the reason behind the prevalence, chapter 2 explores the attitudes of adults in the participating communities and the rationale for the continuing practice. Chapter 3 foregrounds the perceptions of children themselves and seeks to examine the extent to which they accept their role in society to be punished by various actors in their lives. Chapter 4 explores the reasons behind the weak legislative and policy framework designed to protect children from physical punishment.

CHAPTER I

THE PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN IN GHANA: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

1.0. How Prevalent are Physical Methods of Punishment?

There is a general consensus that physical punishment is widely prevalent and socially accepted throughout Ghanaian society. This study further supports this consensus as the majority of children who responded to the questionnaire claimed to experience some physical punishment at the hands of parents or primary caregivers (61.4%) – with 30.4% claiming they experienced only physical methods of punishment at home and 31.0% reporting that they experienced both physical and non-physical methods, as can be seen from Table 4.

Table 4: Ways Children are Punished By Parents/Primary Caregivers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1 Physical	48	30.4
	2 Non-physical	55	34.8
	3 Both	49	31.0
	4 None/They don't Punish Me	4	2.5
	Total	156	98.7
	Missing System	2	1.3
	Total	158	100.0

For those who experienced physical punishment, it appears, from Table 5, that the cane was the most common form of physical punishment (48.1%). Therefore, as Kyei-Gyamfi (forthcoming 2010) claims, caning remains the most common form of physically punishing children in Ghana today.

Table 5: Physical Methods of Punishment Used

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Weeding	1	0.6
	2. Beaten with a belt	2	1.3
	3. Kneeling down	1	0.6
	4. Hitting on the back	3	1.9
	5. Whipping on the back	1	0.6
	6. Slapping me	1	0.6
	7. Hit with a long shoe horn	1	0.6
	8. Beating on the Hand	4	2.5
	9. Give you a knock	2	1.2
	10. Beating me with a Cane	76	48.1
	11. Having to Raise One Leg	1	0.6
	12. Spanking	6	3.8
	13. Fetching Water	1	0.6
	Total	100	63.0
	Missing System	58	37.0
	Total	158	100.0

This was further corroborated in FGDs with adults. In fact, in some homes the cane held a special place:

In many homes they have a special place for the cane to hang and they may send the child to go and get the cane when they are due for a beating. Sometimes the children break the cane so that it is not in the house. But you go and get one or you ask them to go outside and get a stick (MC-2 FGD).

In addition, it was reported that some parents give their children something heavy to carry for a long time or starve the child. According to one female FGD participant,

My niece lives with me and she is very stubborn. If you beat her, it has no effect so I make her squat and stand repeatedly about 30 times. By the time she finishes her legs are hurting so she stops whatever it was she was doing (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

Therefore, many felt that physical punishment was not only about using your hand or a cane on the body of the child, but also about administering other punishments that impacts on the child physically. This can also be seen in the above table (Table 5) as children reported that they were often required to weed, kneel down, normally for an extended length of time, or fetch numerous buckets of water on their heads as punishment.

While it appears that physical punishment is certainly common in Ghana, it is important to acknowledge that the data also shows that a significant number of children experienced a mixture of physical and non-physical methods of punishment. For example, a number of adults participating in FGDs pointed to the non-physical methods they also used to discipline their children:

'The non-physical methods of discipline I use are Godly advice, counselling, instructions and prayer, most of the time. Sometimes I deny them something they love to do for a season e.g. playing games on the computer, watching films, taking them to recreational centres or having dinner outside home etc' (MC-3Q).

'Give him a reward if he avoids the bad behaviour' (MC-3Q).

'Sometimes, the pocket money we give them we reduce it. If we normally give 10,000 then we reduce it to 5,000 cedis' (2nd Nima FGD).

'If I tell the child not to do something and she keeps doing it, I will look for something she likes e.g. biscuit or a TV programme and although I will buy it for her, I will not give it to her or I will not let her watch her TV programme. So I take them away from things that they like' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'Stop them from watching their best television show for a week. Tell them off, use the corner of my eye to disapprove of what they are doing, especially when there are visitors in the house' (MC-3Q).

Therefore, physical punishment is used as only one of numerous methods of child discipline. This corroborates Levinson's 1989 90 country study in which he found that while physical punishment is a critical form of discipline in many societies, it is not the only form adults utilise during the child-rearing process (see Levinson, 1989). According to his findings only 20% of the societies sampled in his study used physical punishment frequently. Instead, he argues that most parents around the world rely on a variety of techniques to discipline their children. In fact, in many of the homes of participants for this study physical punishment appeared to be used as a last resort, as can be seen from the comments below:

'If he has done it for the first time, you take him to the room and speak to him, the second time you will shout a little, but if he does it again you will beat him, but not too much' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'For me, it is the figure three. I will warn you twice and then the third time you get spanked' (MC-1 FGD).

'If I keep telling you to stop something three or four times and you keep doing it, then I spank you or take something you like away from you' (MC-1 FGD).

'You have to call her and speak to her. When you speak to her once or twice and she does not listen then you have to smack or cane her once or twice, but not too hard. With my daughter, I just have to look at her with my eyes and she knows that she needs to stop what she is doing. That is enough' (1st Bukom FGD).

'It is not just hitting. We also talk to them. If you hit too much it has no effect so you have to mix it' (2nd Nima FGD).

'The first time I give him a warning, the second time I will use a stick' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'You call your child and talk to her. If she does it again you speak to her again, but after that you have to beat her. We will speak to them a little before shouting' (1st Bukom FGD).

'I see it as a last resort. If the child will succumb to a lesser punishment, then good. But if the child is too stubborn and tough then the punishment also needs to be tough' (MC-2 FGD).

As a result of the variety of techniques used to discipline children and the use of physical punishment as a last resort, most of the 23 children interviewed claimed that physical punishment was only occasionally administered within the home – to the extent that some could not remember the last time they were punished by parents or primary caregivers. This is further supported by the survey responses. As can be seen from Table 6, only 4.4% of the 158 children who responded to the survey reported that they experienced physical punishment every day while the majority experienced it several times a month or irregularly at the hands of their parents or primary caregivers.

Table 6: Frequency of Punishment at the Hands of Parents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Everyday	7	4.4
	2. Several times a week	29	18.4
	3. Several times a month	42	26.6
	4. Never	12	7.6
	5. Irregular	41	25.9
	6. Not so often	1	0.6
	7. Sometimes	8	5.1
	8. When I misbehave or do something wrong	8	5.1
	9. Once or twice a week	1	0.6
	10. Once a while	3	1.9
	11. Once a month	1	0.6
	12. Once in 2 months	2	1.3
	Total	155	98.1
	Missing System	3	1.9
	Total	158	100.00

It is also worth noting that, while 30.4% of children responding to the questionnaire claimed to only experience physical methods as can be seen in Table 4, it is important to note that 34.8% experienced only non-physical methods, which means that while physical punishment is certainly prevalent, we must not overlook the fact that a significant proportion of children claimed not to experience any form of physical punishment at all:

'I don't get punished at home. My mother just talks or scolds a lot (which I don't like) but it doesn't even happen often anyway' (Novishe, age 13).

'The main method is non-physical. She does not beat me anymore. She stopped when I was 11 because nowadays if I do something wrong and she corrects me I do it. Everything my mother says I listen' (Kuukua, age 11).

'My mother is a very nice woman. Even when we do something wrong, she doesn't get angry. She will only tell us to stop because it's not good' (Kobby, age 12).

'I have not been physically punished in my family before. My parents hardly punish me [in any form] because I do my homework and some the house chores as well as being sent. I read my [school] books' (Mawuli, age 12, Diary).

That such a significant proportion of respondents only experienced non-physical methods of punishment could be due to the ages of the children participating in the study (10-16). If the age of the sample had been lower the responses may have been quite different, as many claimed that they had experienced more physical punishment on a frequent basis when they were younger. However, it is possible some younger children may also not experience physical forms of punishment as a few adults pointed out that they never hit their children, some of whom were quite young:

'Me, when my children do something, I have never hit them. They see how I change in the way I relate to them (e.g. ignore them, not do anything for them etc) and they stop' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'Me, if I hear that someone is going to beat me, I won't want to be at home so I do not like the idea. I was never beaten as a child and I have never beaten my children. I rather use my eyes to let them know that I do not like what they are doing' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

While a variety of non-physical methods were identified by children, including some of those mentioned above, the use of insults was identified as the main non-physical method by a large number of child respondents (39.9%) as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7: Non-Physical Methods of Punishment Used by Parents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Tapping	1	0.6
	2. Ground me	3	1.9
	3. Tell me to go to go to my room	2	1.3
	4. Cleaning the House/Cleaning Bathroom/Cleaning the Kitchen	6	3.8
	5. Kneeling down	4	2.5
	6. No watching of TV or computer for a week/No playing any games	1	0.6
	7. Telling me I cannot go to my friends'	1	0.6
	8. I don't go out	1	0.6
	9. Lock me in my room	2	1.3
	10. Insult	63	39.9
	11. They won't give you money for food	17	10.8
	12. No food	13	8.2
	13. Advice	3	1.9
	14. Sweeping	11	7.0
	15. Washing dishes	4	2.5
	16. Having to work before eating	1	0.6
	17. Fetching water	2	1.3
	Total	135	85.4
	Missing System	23	14.6
	Total	158	100.0

The prevalence of insults as a method of punishment also emerged in interviews with, and diaries produced, by children. As one child Amma, aged 15, told us during her interview:

'My mother is very nice. She hardly canes us. When we do something wrong, she will only insult us for a few minutes and stop'.

Mariama, age 15, who used to be beaten quite badly by her mother and had required medical treatment several times in the past, informed us that now:

'I am hardly physically punished at home but rather I am advised and insulted. My auntie also insults me when I don't do the right thing'.

Nii, age 14, informed me that in the home of his guardian, he mainly experiences insults 'like you are stupid and things like that'. Some adults also admitted that they use insults and curses as a form of child discipline:

'Apart from hitting, I insult the children by saying things such as fool, you are crazy, or 'your mother' even though I am the mother' (1st Nima FGD).

'Me, I insult my children and shout and if that does not work I throw stones at them or I get my brother to come and shout at them because my children are a little older and because he is a man when he shouts on them they listen' (1st Dodowa FGD).

"Since from the age of 14 a parent cannot beat their children [because they are now too big], they curse them and say things like 'your future will not be well'. 'God will punish you'. But the children do not care about these curses because they don't see any effect of them" (1st Bukom FGD).

Although children themselves seemed to see these insults as an improvement from physical punishment, concerns have been raised about this in other spheres. For example, with regards to the teacher-pupil relationship, Stephen Adu, the Director of Basic and Secondary Education of the Ghana Education Service, which is part of the Ministry of Education, informed me that:

We see caning as physical and so we focus on that but some other punishments are more serious and damaging because they are more psychological. The way a teacher will treat a child, talk to a child, a teacher's reaction to a child's question. If a child asks a question, some teachers insult them, say they are stupid and this can dampen the spirit of the child and this leads to some children not coming to school. If you mark the child's assignment and you indicate 0/20 the remarks you write there can also harm the child. So I see the psychological one to be more serious. The physical one we can all see the consequences of. But the psychological one we cannot see. That is why it is more important I think.....The other forms of punishment, people do not see it as serious as caning. So in any forum you attend you find people talking about caning because it is seen as a child rights issue. This is because the emotional ones are more difficult, not easy to describe in the teacher's handbook e.g. if I look into your face in a scornful way how do you describe that? It is the physical one that people see so that is why the [teachers'] handbook focuses on that (Interview, Accra, 26th August 2009).

The significance of this form of punishment has also been identified elsewhere. For example writing of northern Nigeria, Last (2000) found that insulting children is used to cause maximum shame and to humiliate through scorn. Thus, policy-makers need to not only address the physical methods used to discipline children, but also the verbal ways that parents and other adults use to psychologically punish children and examine the impact they may have on their psychological and emotional well-being.

1.1. Physical Punishment and Child-Rearing as a Communal Responsibility

Physical punishment is not only a feature of the parent-child relationship in the Ghanaian social and cultural context, but it is also a feature of the adult-child relationship more generally, as other adults, including teachers, are seen to play a key part in the socialization process. Data from my research on physical punishment in Ghana suggests that members of kin are still, on the whole, looked upon to play their role in child rearing. The majority of adults participating in FGDs for this study accepted that other adults – relatives, neighbours or friends - could also physically punish their children if they had done something wrong, as can be seen from the comments made below:

'Any adult who has been offended can beat the child' (1st Bukom FGD).

'For hard beating then it means he has taken something or he has lied or he has insulted an elderly person and then he deserves a hard punishment. Then the parents accept it and will not go and ask the person why they beat the child' (2nd Bukom FGD).

'If my sister/relatives see my child disrespecting a stranger then they can beat him and I will not complain so that the stranger knows that the child has been corrected and next time will not behave like that' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Before you beat someone's child it means that the child has been very bad so everyone knows that you did not do it out of wickedness' (1st Dodowa FGD).

"Ga people say 'one person gives birth, but not one person raises a child', so we are happy if someone else punishes our child, but if it is excessive we will go and talk to that person" (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'Sometimes when the relatives beat the child we don't complain. We keep quiet to sustain the relationship. So we let it go' (1st Nima FGD).

This data corresponds with much of the literature on child-rearing in Africa, which highlights the active participation of various adults in the socialization process (see Goody, 1973; 1978 Oppong, 1973; Azu, 1974; Nsamenang, 1992; Verhoef, 2005). As Nsamenang (1992) claims child rearing was not, historically, a parental prerogative; it was a collective social enterprise in which parents and kin were active participants. The stress placed on the involvement of other members of kin in the rearing of children was because parenthood was perceived as so critical, and the training of children so crucial, that it was imperative for members of the extended family to participate in the socialization of children in order for them to grow up well trained and disciplined - key values in Ghanaian and other African societies (See Nukunya, 2003; Azu, 1974). Therefore, it is because physical discipline was perceived as an essential ingredient for the socialization process that it was imperative for members of the extended family to participate in the socialization of children. It is within this context that many parents participating in this study claimed to accept the role of relatives and close neighbours to physically discipline their children if required.

This notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that social change has led to changes in this approach to child-rearing, at least amongst some sectors of the population. This was a point that was made in some of the adult FGDs:

'In the past in the community, it was believed that everyone's child was your child. You could tell them off, but things have changed. Some children, because you are not

the mother or father, so when you tell them to stop they won't, even though you are an elder' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'In Nigeria, every adult at all can punish a recalcitrant child, but I've realised that this is not the case in this community. If somebody tries to punish another's child, that parent will quarrel seriously with the one who tried to correct the child so I don't attempt to correct anybody's child' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Before, any woman could punish someone's child, but now laws have changed things, so now you see parents going to ask why [someone beat their child]' (1st Dodowa FGD).

Indeed, some of the personal views expressed by adults in FGDs illustrate that while kinship networks remain important – not least because of the important role the extended family continues to play in ensuring the survival of its members – there is emerging a small minority of adults who object to the idea of relatives and others using physical methods to punish their children:

'I would want to be sure that the child deserves the punishment so I would rather you come and see me because I would be worried that the person may do it too hard as they do not have the same love I have for my child' (MC-1 FGD).

'If my child misbehaves then come and talk to me. You do not go and beat my child. If it is someone in my family [i.e. my mother, sister etc] then that is fine, but not someone outside because you can see that there is no love in the punishment given by that person. What you will do to your child they will do worse and there will be marks. That is why we object. It should be done with love' (MC-2 FGD).

'Physical punishment should be done by family, by parents and sometimes even just by fathers as sometimes the mothers are too tough' (MC-2 FGD).

'I will tell the woman to wait for me to beat my child because she is not the one who looks after the child' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'I feel very irritated when they [extended family members] hit my children' (MC-3Q).

While these attitudes were mainly raised in FGDs with groups of professionals, it also emerged with other groups who felt that while they accept that extended family members can physically punish their children, they would confront anyone who punished their child unjustifiably, that is to say, 'for no reason' or if the punishment was disproportionate to the 'crime'. Evidence from children also appears to support the impact of social change on the ability of members of kin to physically punish them as relatively few children (22.8%) reported that they were physically punished by relatives (other than those with whom they lived as their primary caregiver) as can be seen from Table 8:

Table 8: Do you get Physically Punished by Relatives?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Yes	36	22.8
	2. No	115	72.8
	3. Other	2	1.3
	Total	153	96.9
	Missing System	5	3.1
	Total	158	100.0

Thus, while many continue to accept the role of family members and close neighbours to punish their children, such incidents are actually rare – possibly as a result of social change which has had a huge impact on Ghanaian society in the last 20 years or so.

1.2. The Impact of Social Change on Parent-Child Relations and the Administration of Physical Punishment on Children

Social change has also had an impact in other areas of the child-rearing process. For example, as a result of social change some of the attitudes held by some parents towards their children are changing. Many people have moved from their communities of origin, mainly in rural areas, to settle in urban areas such as Accra. In the process, their lifestyles have changed in many ways. In an interview with Sylvester Kyei-Gyamfi and Florence Quartey of the Ghana National Commission on Children they told me that:

Things are changing. Urbanisation leads to a change in the way people bring up their children. People who are still living in the same communities continue to do what they have been doing for centuries. But everyone now has radio and there are now over 150 FM stations in Ghana, most people have mobiles and this means that urbanisation has moved to communities even if the people have not moved so this can lead to a change in attitudes as well. So Ghana has become a society of two – it is difficult to say this is the traditional society – it is a mixture. Even in a family you see a mixture of the traditional and the modern (Interview, Accra, 13th August 2009).

As a result of the rapid social change that Ghanaian society is undergoing, which is greatly influenced by technology, access to information and exposure to global discourses, there are now two groups in society – those who firmly hold onto tradition and those who claim to be part a modern society. A further group could be added to this – that is, those who are both traditional and modern at different times depending on the issue. And for those who claim to be 'modern', social change has had an impact on various aspects of their lifestyle, including how they raise, and relate to, their children. This point was mainly made in the two FGDs with professional groups:

'In our community [professionals/educated] there is more of an open relationship. Children are open with their ideas, more assertive; parents are more open to children's ideas. The relationship is more cordial...Now parents express their love for other children more, there is more affection and that is the difference. In the past fathers especially did not see it as appropriate to show affection but now they do' (MC-1 FGD).

'In the old days they [children] were supposed to be seen and not heard, but now they are allowed to vocalise their thoughts without being rude' (MC-1 FGD).

'There is a cordial relationship. We do not give them [children] freedom to do whatever they want. But we all show a certain level of love. We share their sentiments. We deal with them as children, as people who have their rights' (MC-2 FGD).

Therefore, there appears to be emerging a group in society that claims to be more open in their interactions with their children, spend more leisure time with their children and are increasingly recognising them as rights-holders.

These changes in the parent-child relationship have also had an impact on how physical punishment is administered within some families. According to Sylvester Kyei-Gyamfi and Florence Quartey of Ghana National Commission on Children:

There is now a perception that you should not overbeat the children and you often hear people asking you why are you beating the child. This is new and it is due to awareness. Before people did not care and could beat the child as much as they wanted (Interview, Accra, 13th August 2009).

That social change may be affecting parents' attitudes to their children and influencing the style of parenting adopted also emerged in the data collected from adults through FGDs and the online questionnaire. A number of parents emphasised the need to use alternative methods which go beyond insulting the child or physically punishing him:

"We need to be able to correct children through reasoning, talking, counselling, and other punishments such as grounding, putting them in a 'naughty corner' and correct their behaviour through the use of positive reinforcement" (MC-3Q).

'I believe children are good listeners, therefore parents should develop the habit of sitting them down and explaining issues to them' (MC-3Q).

'If I have not shown him enough love then I have no business going to beat my child. That will push him away. You cannot just beat him and not acknowledge the good things he has done. Need to find a balance. You do not want a vicious cycle of just beating the child. You want to form character and help them become confident' (MC-1 FGD).

'Parents are what make children stubborn. We do not know how to talk to our children, just shout at them and beat them. We see them as children so we do not have chats/conversations with them, but I think we should not just shout at them and give them orders. We should let them come close to us because when your child comes close to you he will not hide anything from you' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'We should show love to your child and let him become a friend so he can become close to you so when he goes outside and something happens he will come and tell you' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

It is important to note that those making such comments continued to believe in the use of physical punishment. Their point was more about the need to find a balance in how parents punished and treated their children. However, some adults were prepared to go beyond this need for a balance and call for a total rethink of the general approach to the use of physical methods of punishment:

'Physical punishment is not appropriate. Some children's bodies have become so accustomed to it is not effective so you can call an adult who the child respects and ask him to speak to the child alone. This is better than physical punishment' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'Physical punishment should be out of the system' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'I don't think the punishment helps, but rather the child becomes used to it' (MC-3Q).

'When you administer physical punishment the children will grow to be bullies' (MC-3Q).

'And the children are learning from parents so when they see parents insulting and hitting them, they also learn how to insult and fight when they go outside so it is not good' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'If you want your child to be good or do something good for you then it means that we should not talk to them or treat them badly. This means that we should not say something to them that you would not like someone to say to you such as curse them etc' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

Hence, it is possible to identify groups in society who do not believe in the status quo and would actually welcome the prohibition of physical punishment within the family. However, these groups are certainly a minority.

While it appeared that social change may be leading to a change in the way adults treat their own children, concerns have been raised about how non-biological children are treated within the home of their guardians or foster parents as they are more likely to be abused and maltreated than biological children. According to Sylvester Kyei-Gyamfi and Florence Quartey of the Ghana National Commission on Children:

Yes, urban family middle-class families are aware of the need to talk to children. There is also reduced physical punishment of children in urban areas especially amongst the middle-class. So couples have realised they need to talk to their children, allow their children to express their opinions which means they now understand their children and why they do certain things which is different from before when you did not talk to adults unless they asked you a question and even when you responded you had to act shy and not look them in the eyes etc. So it is different for middle-class children now. Only the domestic servants [many of whom are children] have not experienced a change. So although middle class parents have relaxed with their children, the other children who live with them are still punished severely e.g. for losing something, stealing. They are the first to be blamed if something goes missing even if they were not at fault. They are the ones who are starved, burnt with irons etc. Their issues are made worse because now we have estate houses and they are now locked in when [the] master/ mistress goes to work so unless a neighbour is nosy no one knows their plight (Interview, Accra, 13th August 2009) .

Thus, while social change has had a positive impact on the relationship between parents and children within some sectors of the population, there is a need to recognise that not all children in a family are treated the same. This is further supported by a number of comments made by children for this study. Many of the 23 interview respondents pointed out that there were differences in the way children were treated and punished in homes depending on whether they were the biological or non-biological children of the primary caregiver:

'In some homes the parents do not punish their own children but they punish other children that are living with them' (Abena, age 13).

'People living with their parents are punished less than those living with relatives or foster parents' (Mawuena, age 15).

'If some people are living with other children, they sometimes do not punish their own children, but they will be punishing the other children that live with them' (Kobby, age 12).

'Sometimes children who live with other people get punished for the least offence but those people don't punish their own children that way' (Afua, age 11).

'Children who do not live with their parents are punished more' (Ayokor, age 13).

In fact one of the interview respondents, Ayorkor, age 13, who lived with her auntie and only saw her mother occasionally, informed me that:

'I wasn't treated well by my auntie when her children were around but now that they are married, I'm treated well'.

But despite the improvement in the way her aunt treats her, she preferred to be punished by her mother because:

'My mother physically punishes me in a responsible manner [compared to her aunt with whom she lives] so I prefer her punishing me. But she hardly does anyway'.

In another interview a boy, Ekow, age 12, who lived with his grandmother and some other children, two of whom were the biological children of the grandmother, told us that:

'Usually, children are treated the same way but when there's not enough food at home, she gives the available food to her own children and asks the rest of us to wait'.

Most adults participating in this research study felt that they treated all children in their care in the same way – biological or non-biological. However, some acknowledged that some parents do treat children who live with them very differently from their own children:

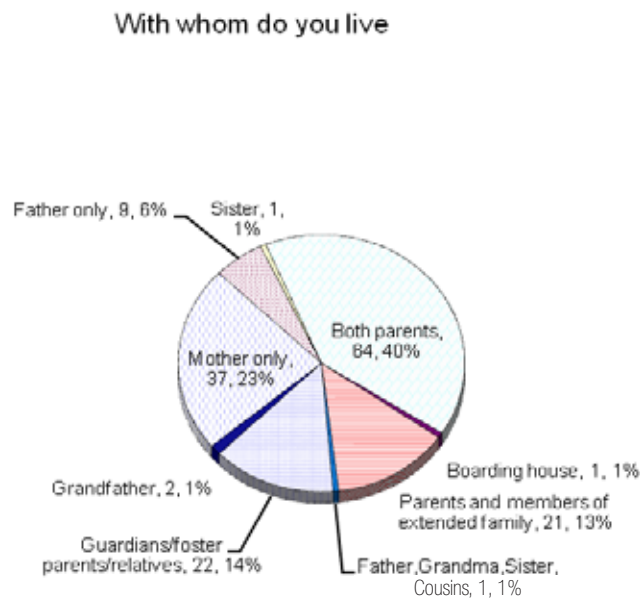
'Some people treat their children like eggs but the foster children they treat them harder and they do not know that that is the child they are really training' (3rd Bukom FGD).

'Some children do not live with their parents so it is like they do not ever do anything good. If they go and do something good they [their guardians] refuse to see it as good' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'If it is your child you cannot hurt them. But if it your brother's child those are the ones you can do wicked things to so everyone who gives birth to their child should look after their own child' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

As a result of the data presented above, a correlation between staying with guardians and the maltreatment of children emerges. In fact, because of the differences some have identified in the treatment between biological and non-biological children, some participants felt that parents should look after their own children as can be seen from the last quote above. And in fact, we can see from Figure 1 below that the majority of children did indeed live with their parents, with 40% living with just their parents, 23% living with only their mother, 6% living with only their father and 13% living with their parents and extended family members. That a substantial number of children who participated in the survey live in a home where their parents are their primary caregivers may further be an indication of the impact of social change on changing attitudes toward child-rearing.

Figure 1.



1.3. Physical Punishment within the Sphere of the School

Another relationship that appears not to have been touched by social change is the teacher-pupil relationship. According to most of the children who responded to the questionnaire (70.9%), the school was the place they were most likely to be physically punished (see Table 9).

Table 9: Where are you Most Likely to Experience Physical Punishment?

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 1. Home-Nuclear Family	21	13.3
2. Extended Family Home	9	5.7
3. Home of Relatives	8	5.1
4. School	112	70.9
5. Church	2	1.3
Total	152	96.3
Missing System	6	3.7
Total	158	100.0

Like the home, caning appears to be the most prevalent method of punishing children, with 74.1% stating that they were caned at school as can be seen from Table 10. However, it can also be seen that like the home, physical punishment at school was not merely about hitting children, but also making them do things that would have an impact on them physically such as weeding, squatting and standing, and being made to kneel down or raise their arms for long periods of time.

Table 10: Forms of Physical Punishment Experienced at School

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 1.Cleaning	3	1.9
2. Sweeping	3	1.9
3. Knocking on the head	1	0.6
4.Beating the child on his/her hands	1	0.6
5. Slapping the child	1	0.6
6. Being made to kneel down	4	2.5
7.Standing with Arms Raised	1	0.6
8. Kneeling with arms in the air	1	0.6
9. Caning	117	74.1
10. Working	2	1.3
11. Beating	1	0.6
12. Weeding	2	1.3
13. Running Around School Compound	1	0.6
14. Squatting and standing for long hours	3	1.9
Total	141	89.1
Missing System	17	10.9
Total	158	100.0

Thus while social change has had had impact on parent-child relations, the same cannot be said of the teacher-student relationship, which remains almost unchanged since the introduction of the cane as a form of punishment during the colonial period. With regards to the foster child-foster parent relationship, there is some evidence to suggest that the position of the foster child may have actually worsened as a result of social change, as parents have began making more and more distinctions between their own children and those of their kin.

1.4. Conclusion

This situational analysis has shown that physical punishment continues to be an important feature of the socialization process-both within the home and the school - although social change has changed the dynamics for children in some sectors of the population. However, while the general consensus is that physical punishment is widely prevalent in Ghanaian society, the data presented presented also illustrates that it is only one of numerous methods used to discipline children. Thus, it is necessary for us to acknowledge methods of child discipline that reinforce positive approaches to parenting and also those that raise issues of concern for children's emotional well-being.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT: ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES AND JUSTIFICATIONS

2.0. The Role of Cultural Values in Understanding the Importance of the Physical Punishment of Children in Ghana

The prevalence of physical punishment in Ghana is due to the fact that it is perceived as a critical component of the child-rearing process. It is believed that there are certain key values which are seen to be important for all to imbibe from an early age, such as respect, obedience, honesty, humility, reliability, fear of God, and responsibility to both family and community. The importance of these values to socialization frequently emerged in all FGDs with adults:

'The main values we instil in children are respect, humility, the fear of God, hard work and truthfulness. Any child that grows up with these values excels at everything. Wherever they go, people will like them - at home, work and in the community - and doors open for them at all times. When you instil these values in your child it will help her in life because it is not all the time the child will be with the mum. She may stay with an aunt or go to school and be a boarder' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Every parent wants to bring a child up to a point where the child will not become a burden onto society and themselves, but rather the child will become a responsible adult, someone who will have a good standing in society, not necessarily a rich person' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Everyone wants their child to do well, to become a good person because wherever he is people will be able to trace his name to where he comes from and so he will not bring shame on his parents' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'We want them to achieve obedience, to behave in a particular way which you think is acceptable' (MC-1 FGD).

'That they should grow up to become responsible adults – someone who is well-mannered, independent, economically stable, not get into trouble with the authorities, people who are disciplined, hard working' (MC-1 FGD).

'We want them to know that they are not being trained for family alone, but for society and nation. So they are not inward looking - i.e. not to be selfish, but to be patriotic/concerned about what goes on around them, beyond themselves and even beyond after they are no more. This is lacking in our society at the moment. People do not care much about this. If people were trained properly they would' (MC-2 FGD).

As a result of the stress placed on these values, it is imperative that children are taught these values to ensure that they behave appropriately when interacting with adults and hence, do not bring shame on their parents whose status in society very often depends on the behaviour of their children. Hence, with regards to respect, for example, children are trained from a very early age that they must respect and obey all elders, be humble towards adults, and take their advice (see Twum-Danso, 2009 a and b). They are not expected to challenge adults and certainly, not expected to question what they are told to do.

Thus, the goals of socialization centre on children being taught these values, which provide the foundation of child-rearing and inform the parenting styles adopted. As one parent put it, 'in training children there are certain methods/stages you go through. As part of a method of training children physical punishment is important' (MC-2 FGD). According to another parent, 'we [physically] punish children because we want their future to be good. When you train a child now and he knows what is good and bad he can become a great person' (2nd Nima FGD). Therefore, there is a link between the goals of socialization and the use of physical punishment. As a result, adults participating in the research had a clear idea as to what misdemeanours required physical punishment as opposed to other forms of punishment:

'If I send you and you do not go I will insult you and I won't give you food on time. If you spoil something I will beat you. If you lie I will beat you very hard' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'A child who steals you will beat him. I will make him stand where the thing was lying and beat him there so he will understand why he was beaten' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'A child who insults an adult/ elderly person needs to be beaten' (1st Bukom FGD).

'When she insults an elderly person she will be beaten' (2nd Bukom, FGD).

'When my daughter does not go to school I beat her because I am illiterate so my child has to be literate so if she plays truant I will beat her' (3rd Bukom, FGD).

Therefore, certain misdemeanours such as disobedience, disrespect and stealing, which are linked to key values that parents are trying to instil into their children, deserve physical punishment due to

the belief that these are essential values that children must imbibe in order to become 'good adults'.

A number of the children interviewed in the study described the circumstances surrounding the last time they were punished by parents or caregivers, which also helps to illustrate the link between certain misdemeanours and the administration of physical punishment on children:

'My mother sent me to go and buy something and I lost the money. When I came back and told her about it, she said I was playing on the way that's why I lost the money and made me squat and stand repeatedly for a while' (Akorkor, age 10).

'I was last beaten about a month ago. My grandmother called my uncle that I have become too stubborn and do not listen to her anymore. So he came and called me to the room and asked me if everything my grandmother has told him is true. I didn't answer, then he started lashing me with a belt' (Kweku, age 14).

'My auntie got angry with a girl who insulted her and wanted to beat her. I intervened on the girl's behalf and advised my auntie to stop. She got angry and beat me instead' (Ayokor, age 13).

'He [my father] called me and asked me to buy something for him around 10pm. I refused to go and he punished me' (Mawuena, age 15).

'My mother had asked me to go and fetch water for bathing. And I was rude to the lady I was supposed to pay the money to. My mother got angry and beat me after the lady complained to her' (Mariama, age 15).

'I took something my mother asked me not to take in the room. She was then not well and was using a walking stick. She got angry and hit my leg with the walking stick and I had serious bruises. My mother's sister came to rescue me and she sent me to a polyclinic and I was treated' (Mohammed, age 12).

'I was punished for being disobedient to my big sister. My parents beat me and insulted me. My uncle begged for me. Afterwards I felt sad and vowed never to disobey her again' (Serwa, age 14, Diary).

'I was last punished on the 29th of January 2009 for not completing my chores for the day. I was punished by my father. He lashed me very hard and this caused bruising on my hands, legs and back. I was crying very much and I was still being whipped. My father was very angry with me and this made me think I would be sick if he continued to lash me. My bigger sister came to my aid. She pleaded on my behalf and told my father that it would not be repeated again. My father told me after the punishment the reason why he had to lash me. He told me that all those chores were given to me to finish on that day because the next day we were going to go to the hospital to visit my sick grandmother. He later apologised for beating me like that' (Nana Adwoa, age 12, Diary).

Added to this, many children often knew the punishment they would receive even before their parents/caregiver became aware of their transgression. Hence, many knew that if they stole or lied or were disobedient to their parents or any other adult, physical punishment was most likely

going to be the method of discipline used. This is partly because children themselves were very clear about what behaviour was required from them in the home as well as in school, which was very much in line with the values adults claimed they were trying to instil in them. For example, according to one child, 'It [physical punishment] is sometimes necessary depending on what the child did. For instance, if a child steals or insults adults' (Sema, age 16). This is supported by Mariama, age 15, who told us that physical punishment in her home was normally used when she and her siblings did not go on errands, talked rudely to adults, insulted others or stole, which is in line with the misdemeanours parents also identified as requiring physical punishment. Therefore, we can see that there is a link between the goals of socialization and the use of physical punishment on children.

2.1. The Role of Religion in Understanding the Importance of Physical Punishment of Children in Ghana

Religion also appeared to play an important part in the decision to use physical punishment in the rearing of children. Biblical teachings, mainly from the Book of Proverbs and other sections of the Old Testament, often emerged in discussions with adults from all social and educational backgrounds, indicating the extent to which parenting styles and child-rearing processes are heavily influenced by such religious beliefs:

'Some attribute it to the bible because the Bible says a good spanking of a child is good, but not to hurt the child' (1st Bukom FGD).

'The Bible says that foolishness is in the heart of the child so you have to beat it out, but not too hard' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'The Bible says those who love their children beat their children' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'Even the Bible says spare the rod, spoil the child so you have to train the child and that includes physical punishment' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'I only do it because the Bible says it. Otherwise I wouldn't do it because it takes a lot of effort for me to spank them. I spend a long time thinking about it before I do it. I don't enjoy it. But the bible says spare the rod, spoil the child' (MC-1 FGD).

'It is important even the Bible says that there is foolishness in the heart of the child. But do not use anger to beat the child wildly; beat the child only when they have done something wrong' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'If it was not effective God would not prescribe it' (MC-3Q).

'Even the Bible instructs us to cane so I apply that from time to time and it works' (MC-2 FGD).

What is interesting about the religious justifications that adults used to explain the physical

punishment of their children is that they focused entirely on the Old Testament of the Bible, which they appeared to have interpreted rather literally. Hence, it appears that the evangelical Christianity that is prevalent in the country today heavily influences the use of physical punishment as a method of child-rearing. This focus on the Old Testament, especially the Book of Proverbs, in explaining the use of physical punishment, has also been found in other societies, including the USA where many conservative Evangelical Christians also appear to literally interpret the teachings of the Bible (Ellison and Sherkat, 1993 in Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006). In Jamaica, for example, Steely and Rohner (2006) found that parents take the teaching 'spare the rod and spoil the child' to mean that young children deserve such punishment and that the deliberate infliction of pain and fear is a necessary part of childhood.

The role religion plays in explaining the use of physical methods to correct children means that although social change may be leading to the emergence, in Ghana, of a growing number of people who may wish to move away from culture and embrace so-called modern values and social change, the kind of modernity that they are moving towards is dominated by Christian, especially Evangelical, values, which, like culture, admonish parents to use physical correction as a method of punishment. Any consideration of the teachings of Jesus Christ from the New Testament appears to be overlooked or not sufficiently taken into account. Having said this, it is worth noting that there are a few pastors who are now trying to foreground the teachings of the New Testament with their congregations. As Sylvester Kyei-Gyamfi and Florence Quartey of the Ghana National Commission on Children informed me:

...there are pastors emerging who are trying to move people from focusing on the Old Testament too much and trying to foreground the New Testament and that Jesus said love your neighbour the way you love yourself and so your child is your neighbour and you should treat her as you would want to be treated (Interview, Accra, 13th August 2009).

This approach must be acknowledged as it is important for people to also take into account that at the same time the Old Testament teaches that parents should 'spare the rod, spoil the child' (Proverbs 13: 24), the New Testament also states 'parents, don't be hard on your children. Raise them properly...' (Ephesians 6:4). Therefore, there is a need to consider the teachings of the Bible holistically instead of adopting a rather selective approach to the teachings of the Bible, which are then used to justify people's actions towards others, including children.

Furthermore, the important role religion, especially Christianity, plays in the decision to adopt physical punishment during the socialization process must surely force us to rethink our association with physical punishment as part of 'African' culture. Thus, while physical punishment, especially caning is often talked about as a Ghanaian or African custom, an essential part of 'African' culture and socialization, we also need to acknowledge that what now appears to be tradition and custom has been greatly influenced, in many respects, by a religion that was originally imported to the continent by European missionaries.

2.2. Physical Punishment is Important But There is a Limit

Despite the focus on physical punishment, a strong emphasis was also placed on the need for parents and other adults to show restraint when punishing children in order for the punishment not to become abusive or excessive. Writing of West Africa generally, Nsamenang (1992) claims that West Africans depend on an unwritten cultural code for judging when punishment exceeds culturally permissible levels. He adds that parents restrain themselves in punishing their children as there are few parental stigmas comparable to being labelled a harsh or wicked parent; thus most parents avoid such stigmas because of the cultural belief that cruelty to children is itself punishable by ancestral spirits (Ibid). This perception was also noted by adults participating in the study who had a clear idea as to how much they needed to punish children and felt strongly about the need to ensure that the method of punishment adopted was not excessive:

'Beating is good, but not so much that it will injure the child' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'Parents should not use anger to beat the child. My father would not beat us at that time. He would do it in the evening and by that time his anger was reduced. But if you do it in anger then you use anything at hand and that is what brings problems' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'You do not beat the child to spoil his life but it is because you want to straighten it so that he will become a good person in future' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'If you do it too much then the child becomes scared of you and that is not good' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'I have given birth to my own child so everything has to have a limit so you have to think of the children's strength and age. So when you beat them more than their strength and age it is not good. It may affect them' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'If you beat a child then use a cane. Some people get so angry they use a knife but that is not good. Should use cane' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'Physical discipline is effective but it depends on how you use it and especially the motive behind it. It is to be used once in a while as a corrective measure. Frequent use or sole dependence on physical discipline as a means of training a child has negative consequences; the child becomes hardened, does not feel loved, thinks he or she is hated, [and has] no sense of belonging etc' (MC-3Q).

'If we say it is not good then it means we want to spoil them [our children]. The punishment my father gave me means that when I see an adult I respect him/her. And that is how I want to raise my children. But you need to know if you say I am going to cane your hand three times then you have to keep it at three and no more' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'Some people will use anger to beat the child but you have to punish when you have calmed down, when your anger has reduced. We have all been children so we know what it is like. So we need to slow down and take our time when punishing our children' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'If you look at children you realise that they are like their parents. The things you don't like in your child are part of you so we need to bear that in mind when dealing with our children and take our time with them' (MC-2 FGD).

It is worth noting that there appeared to be a financial aspect to this need to show restraint. According to a number of people participating in various FGDs:

'If you keep on beating the child and he/she gets ill you are the same person who will spend money to take him to the hospital' (2nd Bukom FGD).

'When you use anger to beat the child and she gets hurts you are the one who has to care for her' (2nd Bukom, FGD).

'But if you beat too much you are the one who will have to take him to the hospital so when you know you do not have the money to do that you don't do it too much' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'We do not beat children to the extent that we have to take the child to the hospital because if we do we are the same people who will have to pay the bill' (2nd Nima FGD).

'If the beating is too much or they injure the child then they [the community] see you as a fool as you are the one who will bear the hospital expense' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

As a result of this need to show restraint when physically punishing children, virtually all adults who participated in FGDs condemned forms of punishment which they saw as being too excessive and often spoke uneasily about those adults who went too far:

'Some parents kick their children and that is not right' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'There is a place near me, a woman fried an egg for her husband and the child took some and so the woman put the child's hand into the pan and left it there and the hand was injured and she had to take her to hospital. The story really hurt my stomach' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Some people, they say the child is a witch because they have not stopped what they are doing so they get a blade and cut the child's fingertips and then put pepper in it and then they bandage it to make sure that the pepper goes into the wounds. That is too much' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'...Those who use the plug of the heater to burn the child and hurt the child, there should be a law to punish them because punishment has a limit' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'Some parents can put iron on the child's back and that is too much' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'The last time I beat my child I gave her 60 lashes for getting involved with a boy. Even her father was crying. But after that I have not beat her since because it even did something to my stomach. It was too much' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'There was this child near my place who had taken her father's money but she denied it. So

the mother put the child's hand in some [hot] ashes and she continued to deny it so she kept it there until she eventually admitted the truth' (1st Bukom FGD).

'I saw one child who had wet his bed. His mother put pepper in his eyes and buttocks and the child was in so much pain that he run into the Dodowa River. So you have to punish the child but there are limits. If it is too much you will not see the child at home' (1st Dodowa FGD).

Two groups of people were particularly singled out for attention for being excessive in their punishment of their children. The first group were single mothers who, in some cases, are becoming detached from extended families as a result of social change and urbanisation, and are increasingly required to bear the burden of childcare by themselves. Concerns raised about this group can be seen below:

'Because the mother is caring for the child/children on her own and if she has no money all the anger she has for the father is what the child will experience' (2nd Bukom FGD).

'Some women will have two or three children and then the father leaves her or she leaves him and so the mother is left to look after the children so when they do the slightest thing she beats them' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Some fathers do not look after the children so the mothers get angry and take it out on the child' (3rd Bukom FGD).

'The issue of the father's absence is very important because it makes the mother take out her anger on the child. She may go and ask him for school fees and he will beat her because he does not have the money and because she did not ask nicely and then she will come home and, in turn, she will beat the child in the same way the child's father beat her' (3rd Bukom FGD).

'Many people have left their husbands so when the child has done something they beat the child while insulting the father. So it is divorce that leads to this' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

This has also been found by previous cross-cultural researchers such as Munroe and Munroe (1980) and Rohner (1986) who suggest that child punishment will occur more often in independent and single-parent households because fewer people are available in those households to relieve the stress of caretaking (in Levinson, 1989). Thus, similarly to Western European and North American societies, it is single-parent families who are socially isolated and lack support systems that communities point to as an area of concern when talking of child maltreatment. The second group pointed to were those who beat their children as a result of financial and other societal pressures. Again, single mothers were identified within this group due to the fact that they were often the ones to face financial challenges:

'Because she is not working and the burden of care is on her, she beats the child' (3rd Bukom FGD)

'Some people are not prepared when they have children. They have not got a job. So that anger she has is what she takes out on the child' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'It is because of lack of money that makes people beat the children too much even when the child does not deserve it because the child has become a burden' (1st Dodowa FGD).

Therefore, while physical punishment, at least in the context of Africa, is often put down as a cultural practice, there is a need to acknowledge that when it comes to the actual maltreatment of children it is not sufficient or even useful to use cultural context as a justification, as very often such contexts contain checks and balances to prevent abuse. Instead, it may be more useful to focus on the social and economic contexts which have been transformed enormously in Ghanaian (and other African) societies since the end of the colonial period and may be leading to the emergence of other factors that may better explain child abuse or maltreatment. This is supported by Levinson (1989) who claims that social change alters traditional family structures, dynamics and values, leading to additional stress on families and destroying the social support network in which families were previously embedded. Thus, social change may better help us to understand child maltreatment rather than culture in and of itself.

These views expressed above demonstrate that societies that tolerate physical punishment do not subject children to random acts of violence at the hands of parents and other adults. Instead, they make very clear distinctions between discipline and abuse, which is normally perceived as a form of punishment which is too frequent, prolonged, or of a nature that is not seen part of the cultural norm (see Montgomery, 2009). Similar findings have been noted elsewhere. For example, in her study of child-rearing in Guinea-Bissau, Einarsdóttir (2000) observed that when the punishment of children was too harsh or prolonged, people talked with unease about the parent, 'claiming that he or she must be sick in the head to beat their child in that way' (Quoted in Ibid: 176).

Because of the distinctions that communities make between discipline and abuse many adult participants in the FGDs reported that they felt able to, and very often did, intervene if they saw relatives, friends or neighbours exceeding the cultural norm when punishing their children:

'Because children cannot say anything so we have to intervene as adults' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'There was one woman in town who did that once [beat her child/children too much] and we called her to speak to her and she has not done it again' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'There is always an intervention in the family even when it is not excessive punishment. Even before it becomes abusive people step in' (MC-2FGD).

'I intervened a few days ago because my neighbour was beating her child and I heard the cries and I went to their place to find out what was happening and I said to her 'this is your own child and look at how you are beating her like that' (MC-2 FGD).

'The child run to me to plead on her behalf so I went to the mother to ask about the offence but she never told me what the child did wrong' (MC-3Q).

'There was a man who used to come home every weekend and line up his children and cane them because they had not been doing what they were told during the week. So I asked him why he did it and I fought with him and told him that he should talk to them. I told him that next

time I will go to the police. I have not seen him do that since' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

Therefore, while the communal nature of child-rearing so often associated with African societies means that children can be punished by adults other than their parents, it also means that the presence of these other adults can prevent punishment within the sphere of the family from becoming abuse. This is done either because their very presence and the support they provide to parents, especially in terms of child care, reduces the likelihood of abuse, or because they feel able to intervene when children are being physically punished even when it is not abusive (see also Korbin, 1981; Ember and Ember, 2005; Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006).

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that a large part of the reason for the continuing prevalence of physical punishment in Ghanaian society today is because it is believed, by adults, to be crucial to the socialization process which is not only influenced by cultural values, but also by religion, especially Evangelical Christianity. However, despite the essential role this practice plays in child-rearing for many adults, nearly all also called for the need for restraint when punishing children and showed their condemnation and disapproval for those within their communities who were excessive in the administration of physical punishment on their children.

CHAPTER III

ELICITING CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT: RE-AFFIRMING THE STATUS QUO?

3.0. The Importance of Physical Punishment to Children Themselves

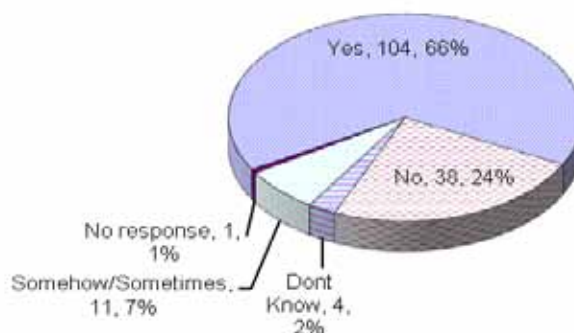
While it is not surprising that adults place a strong emphasis on the physical punishment of children in a country as hierarchical as Ghana, what some have found more surprising is that many children themselves also agree that they need to be physically punished by adults, not just their parents. For example, the Chief of the Child Protection section at UNICEF-Ghana, Sheema Gupta, has found this attitude surprising compared to the attitudes of children in other countries:

I have worked in number of Asian countries where corporal punishment is rife and we have focused on changing teacher and parent behaviour but what I have found shocking here is that children accept this punishment and also believe in it. This, you do not find in Asia (Informal Conversation, Accra, 28th August 2009).

Indeed, when we look at the data collated for this study we see that the majority of the children who participated reported that physical punishment was an important part of the socialization process. Out of the 158 children who responded to the questionnaire, 66% felt that physical punishment was important, with an additional 7% accepting that it was important sometimes or somehow, depending on the situation.

Figure 2

I think physical punishment is important for children growing up



This data is further corroborated by information collated from the 22 interviews conducted with 23 children, most of whom repeatedly included the need for physical discipline as part of the training they require to grow up into honest, well-behaved, self-disciplined and obedient members of their societies– the expected outcome of the socialization process:

'Some children are very stubborn and do not listen when you advice them, so physical punishment is the best way to correct them' (Maama and Kwame, 16 and 14).

'If we are not punished as children we will become bad adults' (Akorkor, age 10).

"Physical punishment is very good, especially caning, because once you remember the pain, you will hesitate to do something that will get you caned. If you do something and get insulted, you can say that 'it's not on your body' so next time you'll do it again" (Afua, age 11).

'Physical punished is used to correct children who go wrong. If it is not used, children will grow up to become corrupt adults, so it's good for parents to physically punish their children' (Nana Amma, age 16).

'The punishment is for our own good. The Bible says that spare the rod and spoil the child, and our parents don't want us to get spoiled. That's why they punish us' (Maama and Kwame, age 16 and 14).

'[Physical] Punishment helps our parents to bring us up in a way that will make us responsible adults' (Amma, age 15).

'Physical punishment is very good because it helps adults to bring up children very well. If children are not punished, they will do whatever they like and that is not good' (Abena, age 13).

'It is parents' duty to train a child to become a good adult and [physical] punishment is one of the ways through which a child can be corrected, so it is good' (Akorkor, age 10).

'Yes. If a child does something wrong and gets punished for it, he/she will be careful next time; if not the child will do whatever he/she likes and grow up to become a bad person'(Amerley, 14).

'[Physical] Punishment is good in the family because I don't think any parent will punish his/her own child too much' (Kobby, age 12).

"[Physical] Punishment is not a nice thing but then it's a right thing. I say yes it is important for growing children because children sometimes are foolish as everybody knows and need to be corrected. If you just talk to them without warning them that there's a punishment they might think that 'Oh yesterday I did this and I was just talked to and today I will do it again'" (Awo, age 13, Diary).

Therefore, while all children who participated in interviews, completed diaries or responded to questionnaires felt that ashamed when they were physically punished and reported that they felt pain, sometimes emotional pain, especially if the punishment was unjust, many still felt that parents had a duty to punish them. As one boy, Kweku, age 14, said to us, 'it's too painful and some of the

lashes leave marks on your body. I don't like getting punished'. However, he went on to add:

Physical punishment is good because when children remember the pain they felt when they were punished they won't do the wrong thing again. Maybe when children get to adolescence, parents can start talking to them because at that time, they know the difference between good and bad.

Another boy interviewed in Bukom was actually surprised by some of the questions asked. When asked how he felt when physically punished, he looked at the interviewer, surprised by the question and seemed to want to laugh and simply said, 'It hurts'. Thus, despite the pain felt, many children did not see this as a 'big deal' and none reported any long-term effects of anger, sadness, bitterness or shame. In fact, many said 'they just forgot about it'. This may partly be because, as mentioned above, physical punishment at the hands of parents, in particular, was done on an irregular basis for many children.² As Kobby, age 12, said,

'I don't remember the last time I was punished [physically] by my parents. You have to do something very very bad before my parents punish you like that'.

Furthermore, it is possible that another reason many of the children participating in the study did not put too much weight on physical punishment was because it rarely caused them any injury. Out of the 23 children interviewed, only two had ever required medical attention as a result of physical punishment at the hands of caregivers. This is further corroborated by the data collated from the questionnaires which shows that of the 158 children surveyed, 111 (70.3%) had never bled or been scarred as a result of the physical punishment they received at the hands of parents (see Table 11).

Table 11: Has the Punishment Ever Left Permanent Scars or Caused Bleeding?

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 1. Yes	35	22.2
2. No	111	70.3
3. Rather Not say	4	2.5
Total	150	95.0
Missing System	8	5.0
Total	158	100.0

Thus, children see this physical correction as part of their training to become members of their societies. In fact, those parents who do not discipline their children are seen to be lacking in their

² See above Chapter 1, Section 1.0

parental duties and are looked upon with disapproval by children themselves as it shows that they are not training their children properly and are thus, not giving them the attention they feel children need. Related to this, many also saw this punishment that they received as act of love which may be related to the prevalence of teachings from the Old Testament of the Bible within this social context. As a result, negative meaning is not attributed to physical punishment, even when it is harsh and frequent, nor is the punishment seen by the parent (or child) as a lack of love or a form of rejection (see also Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006; Steely and Rohner, 2006). This point emerged in an interview with Amma, a 15 year old girl, who lived with both her parents and other members of her extended family, when she informed us that: 'if you do something and your parents don't punish you, it means they don't love you because punishment is to help us to grow to become responsible adults'. To further show how love can be associated with punishment is the case of Isatu, a 14 year old orphan, who lived with her grandmother and was never physically punished at home by her grandmother or any other member of her extended family. Instead, her grandmother provided her with advice and her relatives generally appeared to ignore/overlook her. The interview with this girl was particularly noteworthy as she was the only respondent to become distressed and tearful. This may possibly be because while no one physically punished her, it appeared that they also did not pay any attention to her while they paid more attention to their own children, which included administering physical punishment. This may further be an indication that loving and caring for children includes physically punishing them. Those parents who are seen to leave their children alone and do not correct them when they go wrong are seen to be failing in their parenting duties and not being interested in the welfare of their children.

That children's perceptions of physical punishment are mediated by feelings of love from their parents or primary caregivers is further supported by the fact that children's perception of the punishment they receive at home needs to be put within the context of the relationship they have with their parents or primary caregivers. This point particularly emerged in a number of the diaries completed. One of the girls who completed the diaries, Serwaa, age 14, wrote the following about her relationship with her parents:

We are like mother and child because she cares, loves, disciplines, teachers and helps me. I did not tidy up my room and she spanked me for not doing so and I was not annoyed because I knew I had to do the right thing.....We are like father and daughter. He disciplines me very well and cares for me. He slapped me for not doing my house chores. He always buys me chocolate from work.

Paa Kwaw, aged 14, described his relationship with his mother as follows in his diary:

My mum is a very caring, strict young woman who loves me very much. She cares for me a lot to the extent that she puts me in place whenever I misbehave either by throwing insults at me or whipping me but she has not whipped me since I turned 14 because I am now a young man.

Another 14 year old boy, Fifi, wrote of his father's relationship with the children in his house:

In my family every child has the same right as the other. My dad whips when necessary. Chores are being done and clothes are washed. Anyone found loitering when everybody is working is

given some punishment. We are treated fairly and equally. My dad sometimes is very lenient on us, listens to our views, he is not autocratic. These past two weeks [the timeframe given for all those who completed dairies] all the children were given a break from doing so many chores and my dad let my mom increase the food we get every day. My dad also decided to take us to a hotel to have fun. We swam and ate buffet of food. We relaxed and felt very very comfortable. At the hotel where we lodged, he made them give us royal treatment and everyone had his/her private room. Golf was played by the children and also table tennis.

However, those who did not have a good relationship with their parent/s appeared to write more bitterly about their experience of physical punishment within their family. For example, Aisha, an 11 year old girl who attended a private school and lived with her parents and some of her siblings, wrote in the diary she kept for two weeks, that while she had a very good relationship with her father who was her preferred confidante, her relationship with her mother was quite different:

Whenever I want to tell her something she is in a bad mood. I do not know why but sometimes I feel as if she hates me. That's why she treats me bad among the children. Sometimes I don't know why but I think she loves them more than me. When she came home she looked pale and sad. When she entered the compound I went to hug her. When I was about to hug her she complained that I like hugging people too much and started shouting at me. This is one reason why I sometimes do not like my mother and this is one reason why we usually argue and quarrel.

Her relationship with her mother also emerged as she explained why she did not think physical punishment was important (although she showed some signs of ambivalence):

I do not think physical punishment is important for children growing up. This is because some parents see physical punishment in a different way so they use anything to beat the children. They use some instruments like sticks, shoes, belts, ropes etc. That is why I think physical punishment is not important for children growing up but somehow it is important. It will correct them if they are disrespectful. The reason why I say I do not think physical punishment is good for children growing up is because in my house my mother uses her shoe to beat me sometimes. She also uses the stick from a neem tree to beat me when I do something wrong. She also slaps me and beats me anyhow she wants to beat me. And I am also the only child in the family that she uses those things on.

Later on in the dairy she described an instance when her mother had used a shoe to beat her at home:

One day my younger sister made me very angry to the extent that I wished she died. My mommy called me to the corridor and started slapping me, I fell on the ground and she saw her high heeled shoe. She picked it up and used it to beat me mercilessly I got scars all over my body but I did not say a thing. My uncle, sisters, cousin and auntie saw what my mother did to me but they did not even beg her to stop because she was very angry with me. If any of my siblings had said anything she would have slapped them very hard. Because of that I have never forgotten what my mother did to me. I have never told my father about this because I do not want my parents to get divorced because of me. I love my parents a lot.

Therefore, the parent-child relationship, and the feeling of being loved by parents, influences the way children perceive physical punishment within this sphere.

3.1. Children as Disciplinarians

That children's perceptions of physical punishment generally correspond with adults, and are strikingly in opposition to the international children's rights discourse, can largely be attributed to the socialization process adopted by many families in Ghana. Children have been socialized so well that they regurgitate the values their parents are trying to instil in them. Therefore, it is not that surprising that they, on the whole, also stress the importance of physical punishment. However, we must also acknowledge that children may support this because they see personal benefits for themselves, not just in the long-term as good responsible, respectful, humble, honest adults that everyone expects them to become in future, but also in the short-term, as children. By this I mean, although they are physically punished, children are also given the authority to punish younger children, mainly their siblings. And many of those who participated in the study admitted that not only were they punished by older siblings, but also that they, like their parents, often used physical punishment on younger siblings or cousins:

'If I offend my older siblings they can punish me, or if I do something wrong and my older siblings are around they will punish me...They are older than me and want me to stop doing wrong, that is why they punish me' (Ekow, age 12)

'Last week I beat another child who is 10 because he did not sweep the room. He scattered the place and I had told him to arrange it, and he did not do it so I hit him. Aunty found out and told the boy next time he shouldn't do that' (Nii, age 14).

'If my little sister does something wrong, I usually give her a slap on the buttocks to show her that what she did was not right so that she won't do that again next time' (Amerley, age 14).

'When my younger siblings do something wrong, I usually spank them on the buttocks. I do that so that they will not repeat the act again because if I just tell them not to do that again, next time they will forget my warning and do it' (Abena, age 13).

'My older brother can also punish me. If I take something that belongs to my elder brother, he can beat me' (Owu, age 10).

'My older brother punishes me. He slapped me when I disobeyed him. I also punish my younger brother. In fact, I slapped him a day ago when he disobeyed me' (Mariama, age 15).

'The last time I punished my younger brother was yesterday. I picked him up from school and he insisted I buy bread. He started crying when I refused to buy some for him. This annoyed me so I beat him' (Mawuena, age 15).

'There was once when I was playing with my cousins when one misbehaved so I took the cane and gave him six strong lashes on his back. Later I felt sorry' (Serwaa, age 14, Diary).

'I am a very cool person but sometimes my little sister annoys me and I get angry and punish her. Over the past two weeks [while he was keeping the diary for this project] I punished my sister because she insulted me. I beat her. Afterwards I let her kneel down on a cemented floor. But later on I thought all that wasn't really necessary' (Ebo, age 14, Diary).

Interestingly, some of those who admitted using physical methods to discipline their younger siblings or cousins, had claimed that they were not physically punished at home or had spoken quite strongly against physical punishment earlier in the interview or in their diary, which raises a number of questions about their decision to use it when responsible for younger siblings. Also interesting was the fact that children often punish younger children very often for the same misdemeanours that adults also feel require physical punishment – not undertaking duties, disobedience and misbehaviour. This indicates that the ability of children to administer physical punishment on other children in their families is seen as justified because they play a significant role in the socialization of their younger siblings while relieving their parents, especially their mothers, who are then able to engage in other work or activities within the home or elsewhere. Therefore, their role as carers enables them to punish their siblings in order to correct them and contribute to instilling the values that parents are determined to ensure their children imbibe. The implication of this caring role is that children have a vested interest in continuing the practice of physical punishment. That is to say, their ability to physically punish other children due to their role as carers indicate that children have an interest in preserving this practice – i.e. they take it because they know they can, in turn, dish it out, largely with the approval of their parents as long as the punishment falls in line with what is seen as 'normal' within their socio-cultural context.

3.2. Children's Emphasis on the Need for Restraint in Administering Physical Punishment

While the majority of children felt that physical punishment was important, like adults in their communities, some emphasised the need to ensure that the punishment administered was not abusive or excessive, which they often defined to mean causing an injury to the child, leaving a mark on the child's body or doing it too frequently and for no good reason. This can be seen from the comments below:

'Physical punishment is not bad if the child is wrong but should not be done excessively. Beating a child all over the body mercilessly is not good' (Sema, age 16).

'It is important but shouldn't be abusive. Parents and teachers should not over punish children' (Novishe, age 13).

'Physical punishment can be applied, but rarely and should only be minimal. Dialogue would be more effective because it will make children understand better the reason why they should be of good behaviour' (Dede, age 13).

'Parents should be free to punish their children, but they should not do it excessively' Akorkor, age 10).

'[It is important] Because it [the Bible] says that if you spare the rod you spoil the child so I think it is good but not that you should beat the person so that all of his/her body is sore' (Nii, age 14).

'Adults know what is good or not for children, so they should be free to give whatever punishment they think is appropriate to children, so long as it does not become abusive' (Nana Amma, age 16).

'It is important but should not be too much or in excess. Physical punishment should also not be for every offence' (Ayokor, age 13).

Thus, for these children, it was not the practice of physical punishment itself that concerned them; rather, what they found problematic and resented was any form of physical punishment which was excessive and unjustified.

3.3. Opposing the Status Quo: Children's Objections to Physical Punishment as a Method of Correction

A few children were prepared to go even further than the need for restraint and express resistance to the general consensus that physical punishment was important to the socialization process:

'It is not right for children. Some parents inflict wounds on their children. It can bring conflicts among children if some are punished more than others...Children don't really learn from physical punishment. The same mistakes are repeated sometimes. A few learn from it but others get used to it. Other methods such as advising the child or making them do things they don't enjoy doing will be more effective' (Isatu, age 14).

'I think advising or talking to child can be more effective. Physical punishment does not tell the child the right thing to do but if you carefully explain the situation it would' (Mawuena, age 15).

'Physical punishment is not a very effective method of punishment especially if the child gets used to it and doesn't respond to it anymore. It is better to advice children' (Ayokor, age 13)

'It's not the best form of correction. It's better to advise the child and point out the rights and wrongs to him or her' (Mariama, age 15).

"If a child does something wrong and you can cane him, next time, he will say that 'I will only get caned' and do the wrong thing again" (Kobby, age 12).

'Physical punishment is not effective as a method of correction. Children don't really learn from it. They get used to it so much that it doesn't affect them anymore. The same mistakes are likely to be repeated' (Novishe, age 13).

'...I am aware that most parents use physical punishment to correct their children and for them it works. But these parents are ignoring the hurt feelings of the hurt children. Physical punishment can cause a lot of troubles like putting fear into children, demoralizing them and also pushing them away from the people who physically punish them. I strongly think instead of physically punishing children, children should be spoken to and when they don't listen they should be orally punished but not to the extent of hurting them too much or demoralizing them. I say this because when this oral method is used children won't sustain injuries or they won't be hurt in any other way. In addition children will be given the opportunity to explain themselves instead of shutting them up and physically abusing them which in turn causes us to be too reserved and we can't open up. I also think physical punishment should be considered a crime and shouldn't be allowed to take place. Children can be deprived of certain fun things for a short time to serve as punishment instead of physically abusing them' (Paa Kwaw, age, 14, Diary).

Therefore, while the majority of children re-affirmed the status quo, a minority rejected the importance of physical punishment in society and called for a rethink in approaches to child discipline.

3.4. Children's Perceptions of Physical Punishment at the Hands of Other Adults

One of the areas that this research sought to explore was whether children's perceptions of physical punishment changed depending on who was punishing them, biological parents, vs. relatives, step-parents, teachers and others. With regards to relatives, punishment at the hands of relatives who were not their primary carers was not an experience for most children.³ Those who did talk negatively about their experience of physical punishment or child care at the hands of relatives were those who lived with foster parents and guardians as discussed above.⁴

With regards to school, it appeared that that was the place they were most likely to be punished.⁵ It was also the place the majority claimed the punishment was most severe. Despite the severity and frequency of the punishment experienced in school, many children felt that it was for 'their own good'. Although all children interviewed claimed that what they least liked about school was being physically punished, many still felt they were treated well by teachers and that physical punishment in school was important to guide them in life. For example, Akorkor, a 10 year old who lived in a foster home told us that what she liked least about school was:

'Getting caned by teachers. Some of the teachers like caning us too much. They will cane you at the least provocation'.

Yet when asked for her thoughts on the teacher-student relationship, she said:

'[It is] Good - they teach us every day and when we do something wrong, they punish us to serve as a guide for us'.

³ See above, Chapter 1, Section 1.1

⁴ See above, Chapter 1, Section 1.2

⁵ See above, Chapter 1 Section 1.3

Afua, age 11, told us:

'I feel sad [when I am caned], especially when my friends laugh at me'

But she went on to add:

'If the teachers don't punish us, we will become stubborn'.

Siblings, Maama and Kwame, aged 16 and 14, who lived with both of their parents and their grandmother, were interviewed together. Both of them reported that what they liked least about school was:

'Getting punished for getting to school late. Sometimes teachers give large portions for us to weed when we are late for school',

Despite this they both claimed that they were:

'Treated very well but when we go the wrong way (i.e. talking in class, not paying attention), we get punished'.

Maama went on to add,

'If teachers don't punish us, we will always go wayward so it's good to be physically punished at school when we do the wrong thing'.

Dede, a 13 year old boy who lived with his mother and grandmother and had never been physically punished at home as his mother preferred to engage in dialogue with him, told us:

'We are treated well, but when we misbehave or fail to perform academically we are punished. I think we are treated this way to make us clever and better children...I expect our teachers to teach us well. I expect my teachers to punish me when I misbehave and when I do not perform well in class'.

Therefore, although all of these children were physically punished at school on a regular basis at the time of the interviews, they felt that they were treated well and that the punishment administered by teachers was necessary to ensure they grow up well. Therefore, being 'treated well' in school included being physically punished which is similar to the linkage made between love and physical punishment within the home.⁶

Interestingly, children attending private schools also reported experiencing physical punishment, which was surprising as apparently this form of punishment is not supposed to be applied in such schools (Department of Children and Curious Minds: Children and Youth in Broadcasting, 2008).

⁶ See above this chapter, Section 3.0

Nevertheless even within this context, there were some children who felt they were still treated well despite the use of physical punishment:

'Children in my school are treated with care and kindness. They are physically disciplined by teachers when they move in the wrong direction. They are taught what is right and wrong. They are taught how to humble themselves in the eyes of teachers' (Nana Adwoa, age 12, Diary).

'Children in my school are treated well. They are not beaten mercilessly but some teachers cane with anger. Children are treated with love and care. Teachers treat children like they are their own' (Aisha, 11, Diary).

However, some children in both public and private schools spoke very bitterly about their experience of physical punishment in school:

'[What I least like about school is] Getting caned for anything you do. When you get caned, it's painful and your friends will also laugh which makes you feel bad' (Kobby, age 12).

'Sometimes teachers punish unnecessarily. There is always one thing or the other to pay for. Sometimes a teacher comes to the class and hits everyone's back because the class is noisy. They don't consider whether you have been noisy or not' (Mawuena, age 15).

'I remember the time I was punished at school by one of my teachers. I was punished because I forgot my homework at home. I was punished by getting seven lashes on my back. That day I felt really embarrassed' (Ebo, age 14, Diary).

"Sincerely children in my school are treated as foolish pupils who need to be moulded by teachers. At times we are afraid to even approach a teacher and speak our minds on the subject he/she does. When a teacher walks in our mouths begin to leap into our hearts. We sometimes aren't treated with respect. Children are whipped unnecessarily and by heart. Last week our club activities were cut off for lessons. We had no say in this and weren't informed about it earlier. Our plans for our clubs and contributions had been completely shattered. As the saying goes 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. This same time our teachers ganged up to be more strict on us and anything we got wrong in exercises we were lashed for and this was completely unfair" (Fifi, age 14, Diary).

Therefore, it can be seen that physical punishment in school caused more anger and feelings of bitterness, partly because it was often done publicly, causing students to be ridiculed and often administered to an entire group meaning that some children who had not done anything wrong were punished for the actions or behaviour of their peers.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that not only do adults firmly believe in the practice of physical punishment, but that the majority of children who participated in this study also emphasised the importance of this practice. This further helps us to understand the prevalence of physical punishment within this social and cultural context. Moreover, and importantly, the findings of this chapter must surely raise some questions about children's views and children's rights. That child participants to this study, on the whole, supported the use of physical methods of correction and even claimed to administer it to younger children in their care, has implications for the very concept of children's rights, which rejects any form of physical punishment while at the same time promotes the importance of considering children's views. The key problem that this chapter has highlighted is that while we often assume that children, when asked for their views, will support the principles on which the children's rights discourse is based, this is far from guaranteed. Thus, policy-makers need to explore how they can reconcile children's views with children's rights even when these views are in striking opposition to the rights they are promoting around the world.

CHAPTER IV

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

4.0. The Legislative Framework to Protect Children from Physical Punishment in Ghana

In a number of respects, the Ghanaian legislative appears to be conducive to protecting children from physical punishment. The 1992 Constitution stipulates, in Article 28 (3), that a ‘... child shall not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment’. Article 15(2) of the Constitution also states that:

No person shall, whether arrested or not, restricted or detained, be subjected to (a) torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, (b) any other condition that detracts or is likely to detract from his dignity and worth as a human being (Government of Ghana, 1992).

In this way the Constitution protects all Ghanaians (adults and children), at least in legislative terms, from any treatment or punishment that compromises their human dignity. Furthermore, the 1998 Children’s Act (Section 13.2) stipulates that:

No correction order is justifiable which is unreasonable in kind or in degree according to the age, physical or mental condition of the child, and no correction order is justifiable if the child by reason of tender age or otherwise is incapable of understanding the purpose of the correction (Government of Ghana, 1998).

For punishment that is deemed as unreasonable and unjustified, the penalty ranges from imprisonment not exceeding a period of one year, or fines not exceeding 5 million cedis (GHC 5,000) as provided in Section 15 of the Children’s Act.

Despite this there remains a certain amount of ambiguity in the legislative and policy framework. Firstly, despite the provisions of the Children’s Act, there remains confusion about what is ‘justifiable’ or ‘reasonable’ punishment as the Act does not provide a definition for these terms. This is a problem that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly raised in its Concluding Observations on Ghana (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). Further, although the Criminal Code of 1960 (Act 29) prohibits assault and other physical actions intended to cause harm to a person, including children, the Criminal Code Amendment Act 1998 (Act 554) outlines acceptable corrective measures for children. Therefore, it could be argued that the modification of this law, introduced after Ghana had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, further strengthens the power of parents to discipline their children instead of taking steps to ensure that children are protected from physical punishment as stipulated in the Convention.

4.1. The Impact of Cultural Norms and Public Attitudes on Laws and Social Policies

This ambivalence that can be noted in the legislative framework can be attributed to the views and attitudes that are prevalent in Ghanaian society, which indicates that cultural norms and values regarding child discipline often filter into laws and social policies that regulate and support parent-child relations (Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006). This is indeed the case in Ghana as the majority of adults who participated in FGDs rejected, in no uncertain terms, the introduction of laws within the home to address the physical punishment of children:

'It [government intervention] is not good because it won't help us. We don't want it' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'As for the house, the government should leave this for us. They should control schools, but they should leave the home for us. Otherwise the children will spoil' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'Ah, No. My home is my castle so why should you come there and interfere' (Teachers' FGD)?

'If they bring it into the homes they will spoil the whole of Ghana' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'My house is my house. They should leave it alone' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'The government also has its responsibility. If the government does not help me in my house and he just writes laws to punish me then it won't help. They should also see how they can help so that those things that make parents frustrated so they hit their children will not happen like a welfare package. But if there is not food and it is my business only to ensure that there is food and no one helps me, you cannot then come into my home and tell me how to treat my child' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'This legislation should not be introduced because I cannot bear the idea that we can go to jail for beating our children. It is the same for the domestic violence bill. Some husbands go to jail for beating their wives and that is not good because it spoils the name of the family and when the husband comes back, he will pack the wife and send her out of the house. So it is not good and it is the same for any law that will send parents to jail for beating their children' (2nd Nima FGD).

'It [a law banning physical punishment of children] is against God's word and his prescription for discipline. Moral standards will rapidly degenerate. Parents will lose control over their children' (MC-3Q).

'We would find it difficult for government to regulate our homes' (MC-2FGD).

'This is a gradual [process] to what goes on outside. Next they will say don't touch the child. That should not be accepted' (MC-2FGD).

These comments show a rejection of any intervention by government agencies within the family as this sphere is seen as the responsibility of family members. This is largely because in a context where there is little or no social welfare or support from the government, it is still the family that

continues to support its members in times of illness and unemployment and so on. LeVine and LeVine (1981) further support this when they argue that child rearing in Africa is the exclusive province of the family in which outsiders of any sort, including representatives of government agencies, are not licensed to intrude. Thus, there is an attitude, as can be seen from one of the quotes above, that since the government does not little (if anything) for families, it has no right to intervene in what goes on in the family context. This is further corroborated by Gagnon (2005:4) who states that, 'public intervention is quite alien to Ghanaian society'. Even civil society, which is very much aware of children's rights and the relevant legal and policy instruments, has not developed a habit of reporting cases of child abuse to the Department of Social Welfare. In their research on violence against women and children in Ghana, Cusak and Appiah (1999) note that:

Reporting to state agencies is rare even when there are medical injuries; cases are being arbitrarily referred back to the family and/or community and cases are being closed as trivial, false and lacking in evidence.

This rejection of any government interference within the family was partly because a number of participants felt that a law was not necessary as parents did not use physical punishment to hurt children:

'No, we do not like it [the idea of government intervention] because we can take care of [our] children. We do not beat children to the extent that they have to take the child to the hospital because if we do we are the same people who will have to pay the bill' (2nd Nima FGD).

'I will be against that [the introduction of any law] because I do not hit my child to cause harm and I think it is proper for me to do this because when compared to other societies, I think that we in Ghana are better behaved' (MC-1 FGD).

Others also expressed their resistance to such laws because of a fear that their children will turn into 'Western children' or 'white children' if such laws were introduced into society. This emerged in a number of FGDs with adults, especially those who had spent some time training or living in Western Europe or North America:

'[If they introduce laws] children will take advantage of this and the system will break down. That is the problem over there [Europe/North America]. Children can call social workers on their parents and that is not right. It creates divisions in the family' (MC-2 FGD).

"In the US someone can look their father in the face and tell him that 'he is stupid' which we think is unacceptable. That is why some people over there bring their children home to be trained because they cannot stand the way things are done over there" (MC-2 FGD).

'I cannot stand it when I hear the way children in the UK talk to adults. That is not acceptable. That is also going overboard. That is one reason when I went there I could not stay there. Even over there there is a difference between the children of parents who smack their children and those who don't. The former are better behaved. There should be moderation. Not too much beating, but also do not let the children be rude' (MC-1 FGD).

'Also must bear in mind the children's behaviour these days. The children of today are different. TV is influencing them. They see something and think it is ok for them to do too. So they watch films from the West and want to copy the behaviour and the parents beat them for that' (1st Bukom FGD).

This is an issue also raised by Kavapalu (1993: 32) who found, in her study of the Tonga, that adults frequently complained that overseas influences were turning their children into Westerners because they were no longer upholding the basic 'Tongan values' of respect and obedience.

This reluctance for governments to intervene within the context of the family also emerged in both the questionnaire administered to children and the interviews conducted with this group. 76.6% of the 158 children who responded to the questionnaire disagreed with the statement that 'physical punishment within the home/family should be made illegal' as can be seen from Table 12 below.

Table 12: Physical Punishment within the Family should be Made Illegal

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Agree	35	22.2
	2. Disagree	121	76.6
	Total	156	98.8
	Missing System	2	1.2
	Total	158	100.0

Some of the reasons for this rejection of laws within the family by children themselves emerged in the interviews conducted with 23 children:

'No [there is no need for any government intervention in the home]. Parents are supposed to punish their children so they can correct them when they are wrong' (Maama and Kwame, age 16 and 14).

'No [there is no need for any government intervention in the home], the government should not do anything about punishment within the family, or children will become too stubborn' (Kweku, age 14).

'No [there is no need for any government intervention in the home]. Physical punishment is for our own good. If parents don't punish their children they will become stubborn and when they grow they will not be responsible adults' (Afua, age 11).

'Punishment helps our parents to bring us up in a way that will make us responsible adults so there should be no law' (Amma, age 15).

'No [there is no need for any government intervention in the home] because I don't think someone can come from outside to show our families what to do' (Mohammed, age 12).

'No [there is no need for any government intervention in the home]. Parents are supposed to punish their children so they can correct them when they are wrong' (Abena, age 13).

These views expressed by children may partly be attributed to the fact for many of these children physical punishment within the home was only one of a variety of methods used and was thus, used irregularly and in most cases did not cause them any injury. Therefore, they did not feel that it was necessary for legislation prohibiting the practice within the home.

Having said all this, it is worth noting that there were also those children who felt that a law reducing the practice would be useful in the home even if they felt that the practice was important for socialization:

'Physical punishment should be done more carefully in order not to wound the child involved. Parents should be advised not to hurt children in the process of physically punish them' (Oko, age 15).

'Yes [a law would be useful], because some family members apply physical punishment to the extreme' (Dede, age 13).

'Yes [a law would be useful] because the beating is too much in the house. Parents should not beat their children all the time. If a child has done something wrong they should talk to her' (Kuukua, age 11).

'Yes [a law would be useful]. Parents and teachers should be advised on the need to talk to children instead of physically punishing them' (Mawuena, age 15).

'Parents should be advised on the need to minimise physical punishment' (Ayokor, age 13).

'Yes [a law would be useful]. It will stop parents from punishing children unnecessarily.

Sometimes we get punished for very least offences which is not too good' (Ekow, age 12).

'Yes [a law would be useful], some parents if you do something wrong they use ladles and big sticks that should not be used to hit human beings. So the government should stop them using those things. They should just use the cane but not too much. They should let us feel happy in the home' (Nii, age 14).

'Well, it will be good to have laws within the family too, because some parents also punish their children too harshly' (Amerley, age 14).

The important point to note from these statements is that even those children who felt that a law would be useful within the sphere of the family were not calling for an outright ban. Instead, they felt that what was required was a law that would instruct parents and other primary caregivers to minimise their use of this practice in order not to hurt children.

It is partly because of the attitudes of both adults and children that the legislative framework in Ghana for protecting children from physical punishment, especially in the home remains ambiguous and ultimately weak. Policy-makers find it difficult to draft legislation that closely follows the principles of the Convention in this area because they know that the public will not support it and as a result, it will not be implemented. This emerged in my discussion with Stephen Adu, the Director of Basic and Secondary Education at the Ghana Education Service, who informed me that:

The country appears to be divided. Some are in favour of caning. Some are not. So we cannot say that caning should be abolished. What people are interested in is for children to change from old. But society is interested in caning (Interview, Accra, 26th August 2009).

This shows the extent to which public attitudes influence the drafting of law and policy, leaving policy-makers reluctant to draft more stringent laws that will ultimately be rejected and thus not implemented.

4.2. Government Intervention in Schools: Making Up for the Lack of Intervention within the Home?

Instead, or because of the wall of resistance around families, various governments have been more proactive about intervening within the sphere of the school, which they feel they have more control over. This point emerged in two separate interviews with officials of different government agencies:

It is difficult to intervene in the home because it is the mum, father and others in the house who are responsible for the child so the upbringing of the child is the family's responsibility so [it is] difficult to apply laws in the family. But for school, schools are either owned by the government or are private entities so it is easier for governments to set rules as the government has a big hand in schools, especially public schools (Interview with Sylvester Kyei-Gyamfi and Florence Quartey, Ghana National Commission on Children, Accra, 13th August 2009).

There is a barrier, a kind of information wall around the homes. You will not get that information [about excessive punishment] from the homes. The school is a public space so you can get that information. But in the home, parents believe that it is their child. So if it is not tragic you will not hear about it. If you are not aware that an offence has been committed you cannot record it. The wall is because of culture and economics. The perpetrator is often the breadwinner so he has the right to do anything and the mother cannot say anything (Interview with Acting Superintendent (ASP) Freeman Tetteh of DOVVSU, Ghana Police Service, Accra, 19th August 2009).

Furthermore, it can be argued that governments feel confident to intervene in schools because

there is more public support for intervention within this sphere, which also emerged in both adults and children's attitudes. For example, a number of parents felt that while physical punishment was important within school, there was a need for laws within this sphere to ensure that the punishment did not become abusive:

'Some of the male teachers want to have affairs with the female students and so when the girls refuse they beat them when they do slightest thing wrong in class' (1st Dodowa FGD)

'Most of the teachers think that all children are witches so when he has a bad dream he thinks that it is one of the children so when he comes to school the next day he will beat them' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'The teacher himself is hungry and angry because the government does not pay him well so he can transfer his hunger and anger on the child and he can beat him too much' (1st Nima FGD).

'The school is worrying because I don't know how they will do it [how they will punish the children]. I changed my kids' school because of it (and this was a private school) but even at this new school which is also private they do it. My daughter came home with a swollen hand and I had to go and find out what happened and what she had done did not warrant a caning. She was hit for nothing. I let them know that I was not happy' (MC-1 FGD).

'I believe that if children go to school they should not be lashed. If there is a problem they should call the parents to come to the school. If the parent decides to lash the child at school then that is fine' (MC-1 FGD).

A number of children too felt strongly about the need for legislation within the sphere of the school:

'Yes. They should tell teachers so that they stop beating us too much, but not completely. Some teachers they hit your buttocks so much you can't sit down. You can only sit half way' (Nii, age 14).

'I think they should [introduce stricter laws in schools] because some of the teachers punish pupils too harshly' (Amerley, age 14).

'Yes [they should introduce stricter laws] because some of the teachers punish us too much. The law will be good if it is enforced (Abena, age 13)'.
'I think they should enforce the laws in schools because some teachers are too wicked and punish too harshly' (Kweku, age 14).

'Yes, some of the teachers will just punish you for the least offence, so I think the government should enforce the law you just told me about' (Kobby, age 12).

What was interesting to note in these children's perceptions was that while some respondents felt quite strongly about physical punishment in school and the need to eliminate or reduce it, they still felt that physical punishment within the home was an important part of the child rearing process. This may partly be because, as one girl stated, 'I prefer being beaten by my parents

because teachers just whip you anyhow and hurt you most of the time but parents are more careful' (Mawuena, age 15).

Hence, because of the support that is available for government intervention to curb physical punishment within schools, a number of initiatives have been adopted for the education sector. The 1994 Teachers' Handbook, for example, which is currently being reviewed, provides guidelines in the use of corporal punishment in educational institutions. It stipulates that caning should be administered by the head of a school in his or her office. In addition, punishment should not exceed four strokes at the basic education level and six strokes at the secondary level. The strokes given should be recorded in a logbook which is supposed to be kept under lock and key (see Department of Children and Curious Minds: Children and Youth in Broadcasting, 2008). From this it can be seen that while steps have been taken in the sphere of schools the government still has not introduced an outright ban due, in large part, to the public support for physical punishment even within this sphere.

4.3. Problems of Enforcement

The public support that appears to support the continuing administration of physical punishment on children not only explains the rather weak legislative and policy framework, it also has an impact on the ability of agencies to enforce laws and policies, as pointed out by ASP Freeman Tetteh of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service:

We meet resistance because parents believe that they have the child so they can do what they want with their child. But the law says that once the child is born it belongs to the state so you have no right to do anything you want with your child (Interview, Accra, 19th August 2009).

Enforcement has also been problematic within the sphere of the school despite the element of public support for legislation within schools. In fact, relatively few children surveyed (31.0%) had heard of the regulations stipulated in the Teachers' Handbook as can be seen from the table below:

Table 13: Are you Aware of the Rules about Physical Punishment in School?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Yes	49	31.0
	2. No	102	64.6
	Total	151	95.6
	Missing System	7	4.4
	Total	158	100.0

Not only were the majority of children who responded to the survey not aware of the rules as

outlined in the Teachers' Handbook, most (58.9%) reported, once they had been informed of the rules, that they were not applied in their school.

Table 14: Are these Rules applied in Your School?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Yes	39	24.7
	2. No	93	58.9
	3. Rather not say	2	1.3
	Total	134	84.9
	Missing System	24	15.1
	Total	158	100.0

The lack of impact of these laws can, partly, be attributed to the support for physical punishment in schools. While some adults felt that laws within the school would be useful as seen above, most felt that teachers had the right to administer physical punishment and were sceptical of the introduction of regulations to curb it:

'But now that the teachers do not beat them when the child sees the teacher outside he does not care how he behaves' (1st Dodowa FGD).

'This is what spoils children. When they say we should not beat children, they spoil children, they do not respect' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'These rules are not good because you go to school to teach and as a teacher if you see a child doing something bad and you cannot beat her it is not good. If you beat it will help her' (2nd Dodowa FGD).

"Because teachers can't beat children, the children disrespect, they talk anyhow 'beat me if you dare and I will tell my mother and we will go to the police'" (2nd Dodowa FGD).

'If we do it like that [introduce laws] the children will spoil. When the children do something bad all the teachers can do is look at them and that is not good' (2nd Nima FGD).

'Which one of us went to school and was beaten and died? So now what the government is doing [regulations in the Teachers' Handbook], they want to spoil our children for us' (Pokrom Nsaba FGD).

'All the beating they are doing to children is to teach them sense so they are training them' (3rd Bukom FGD).

Children's views too showed that most were against the introduction of laws to curb physical punishment within this sector. Although a number of children had felt that a law within school would be useful as shown above, the majority of questionnaire respondents (67.1%) disagreed with the statement that 'physical punishment should be made illegal in school' as illustrated in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Physical Punishment should be Made Illegal in School

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. Agree	50	31.6
	2. Disagree	106	67.1
	Total	156	98.7
	Missing System	2	1.3
	Total	158	100.0

This view further emerged in the majority of the 22 interviews with 23 children who felt that the government should not intervene in the school:

'The government should allow teachers to do what they are doing; otherwise children will become too stubborn' (Amma, age 15).

'If children know that their teachers cannot punish them, they will not respect' (Afua, age 11)

'It's [the regulations are] not good because our teachers are the one who know us best so they will be better able to decide the best punishment' (Akorkor, age 10).

'I don't think the regulations are good, because it will make the children more stubborn' (Maama, age 16 who was interviewed with her brother Kwame, 14).

'I expect my teachers to correct me when I am wrong so that I can grow to become a good citizen so I do not agree with the rules' (Amma, age 15).

Thus, even in the area of the school where there was support for government intervention, the overwhelming majority of adults and children who participated in this study rejected the idea of a ban on physical punishment within this sphere, which not only has an impact on how policies are drafted and worded, but also has an impact on the enforcement of such policies.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration when exploring the limited enforcement of laws and policies within both the home and the school is the role of enforcement agencies themselves. As all staff of these agencies are part of the societies in which they are expected to enforce government laws, many also fundamentally disagree with the laws that have been drafted by legislators and policy-makers, and often find themselves torn when presented with a case of physical abuse. For example, Stephen Adongo, Director of the Department of Social Welfare which is part of the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment, told me that:

There are some social workers who are torn between their work and their upbringing. In our definition of child abuse we sometimes wonder whether we are making white children out of Ghanaian children but we are social workers and must work within the law. That is why physical punishment is so difficult to deal with. Social workers have two personalities and that will have an impact on the way they mediate between parents and children (Interview, Accra, 19th August 2009).

This further emerged in my interview with ASP Freeman Tetteh of the Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service who informed me that:

When it comes to the issue of caning in schools, we have all gone through that system and we all have our perceptions of it and we policemen and women are part of the community so the law enforcers might not take any complaints about caning in school seriously which can make the complainant look stupid. But there are some forms of caning that deform the child and for those cases no one will have to ask the police to take action. We will do it straight away. But in minor cases of bruises you will even see the policeman agreeing with the teacher (Interview, Accra, 19th August 2009).

Hence, not only do public opinions have an impact on the drafting and passing of laws, but they also affect the ability, and even willingness, of enforcement agencies to carry out their mandate as they are also part and parcel of the society and thus, share, to a large extent, the opinions of the public at large.

4.4. Conclusion

Therefore, although there are a number of laws and policies to protect children in Ghana, with regards to physical punishment, the drafting and the wording of laws and policies, especially in relation to the home, is ambiguous and weak and thus problematic to enforce. That the laws are ambiguous and weak can be attributed to the overwhelming public support that exists within this social and cultural context for the physical punishment of children, not only in the home, but also in school. As a result, the practice remains prevalent and this will remain the case until there is a change in public opinion.

CONCLUSION

This research project was based on the premise that children make distinctions between the physical punishment they experience at the hands of various adults in their lives. Thus, the primary aim of this research project was to explore the extent to which children in Ghana, the first country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in February 1990, accept their role in society to be disciplined by the various adults in their lives – biological parents, relatives, foster parents/guardians, step-parents and teachers. Secondly, the project sought to develop a deeper understanding of the context within which physical correction occurs as part of the socialization process.

Summary of Findings

Following on from this starting point the project sought to highlight the prevalence of physical punishment in Ghana with a particular focus on the home, showing that while the majority of children experience some physical punishment, a substantial number did not experience any punishment at all, which must not be overlooked in any analysis of child-rearing in Ghana. Instead, the study demonstrates that they experience methods of child discipline which are more akin to positive parenting practices that have been introduced into the country as a result of the tremendous socio-economic changes that have taken place in the past 20 years or so. However, some of the other non-physical forms of punishment such as insults raise concerns for policy-makers due to the potential damage they can cause to children's psychological and emotional well-being, not only as children, but also in future as adults.

Furthermore, the research showed that physical punishment was not only a feature of the parent-child relationship, it was also a characteristic of the adult-child relationship more generally, with many adults accepting that relatives, friends, neighbours and teachers can also use physical methods of punishment on their children. However, it was also found that as a result of social change some of these attitudes are changing, with some people rejecting the idea of relatives and teachers physically punishing their children. Furthermore, evidence from children themselves showed that the actual occurrence of physical punishment at the hands of relatives, other than those with whom they lived as their primary caregivers, was relatively rare.

To explain the prevalence of physical punishment within Ghanaian society, the study also sought to explore the attitudes of adults who play a key role in understanding children's daily lives. What emerged was that most adults strongly believed in the importance of physical punishment as part of the socialization process, not only because of the stress placed on cultural values that must be imbibed by all children in order to ensure they grow up into 'good adults', but also because of the current prevalence of Evangelical Christianity in the country, which tends to focus disproportionately on the teachings of the Old Testament of the Bible and its calls for parents to use physical methods of punishment to correct their children. However, despite the strong emphasis placed on the need for physical punishment, virtually all adults were equally adamant that parents must show restraint

when punishing children in order to prevent abuse, which they condemned in no uncertain terms. Groups that they pointed to as particularly concerning when it came to excessive punishment of children were single mothers and those under severe financial pressure. Therefore, when it comes to making sense of the actual maltreatment of children, culture may not be a useful explanation, as very often it contains checks and balances to prevent abuse. Instead, it may be necessary to pay closer attention to other contexts such as those relating to the socio-economic as they may be leading to the emergence of other factors that may better help us to understand child abuse or maltreatment within this context.

The prevalence of physical punishment within Ghanaian society is further explained when we turn to explore children's perceptions, the central aim of this study, as most children who participated in the study also emphasised the need for parents and other primary caregivers to use physical punishment on children in order to ensure they grow up into well behaved and responsible adults. Interestingly, a link emerged, in some children's views, between love and children's acceptance of physical punishment. In addition, as children often tend to play a role in the child-rearing process it also appeared that the importance they place on this may be due to the fact that they are also able to punish other children, mainly siblings, very often for the same reasons their parents would – disobedience, disrespect, misbehaviour - and thus, they have a vested interest in continuing the practice. However, despite the stress they also placed on physical punishment, they were quick to also underline the need for restraint in the administration of this practice – something they defined as not being overly prolonged, too frequent and 'for no good reason'. Thus, for these children, it was not the practice of physical punishment itself that concerned them; rather, what they found problematic and resented was physical punishment which was excessive and unjustified.

Most of the resentment about physical punishment was particularly targeted at schools where the majority of children claimed that physical punishment was most frequent and most severe. While many felt that the punishment in school was also necessary for their socialization into 'good adults', it emerged that some children made distinctions between the physical punishment they experienced at the hands of parents and teachers. For example, while many claimed that physical punishment within the sphere of the home was important and thus did not require any government intervention, they strongly felt that punishment within school did require some kind of government intervention, as they perceived their treatment at the hands of teachers as being too harsh.

As a result of the overwhelming public support for physical punishment the current legal and policy framework to protect children from this practice in Ghana is weak in terms of both the wording of laws and policies, which are often ambiguous and confusing, and the implementation of such laws and policies. It appeared that successive governments have been reluctant to intervene within the context of the family due to resistance from families who reject the idea of government intervention in their lives, especially intervention from a government that does little (if anything) to help them in times of need. As a result, governments have hitherto focused on adopting initiatives to curb (not ban) physical punishment within schools as they feel they have more control over this sector. However, even within this sphere, the enforcement of policies has been weak, again, partly because of the public support that exists for the continuing administration of this practice in schools. Hence public support has led to a weakened legislative framework, which, has, in turn, affected the enforcement of any laws. Therefore, the practice of physical punishment remains widespread in communities across Ghana.

Concluding Remarks

The overwhelming public support that exists in Ghana for the continuing use of physical punishment as a method of child discipline requires policy-makers to move beyond strategies focusing on educating local communities in the hope of changing their mindsets and behaviour. This is important to consider because as this study has demonstrated, while many people who participated in this research were aware of changes in attitudes and laws in other societies, they insisted that physical punishment was key to the child-rearing process in their contexts and they objected the introduction of laws within the home to curb or ban it. There was, furthermore, a sense that while attitudes and parenting styles have changed in other societies, 'this is how we do it here' and that ultimately they felt Ghanaian children were 'better behaved than those elsewhere' (i.e. in Western Europe or North America). This is further supported by Harris-Short (2003:177) who claims, in an article on the relativity of children's rights, that the cultural values and principles of their own cultures may lead communities to 'look in horror at the individualistic rights-based ethos of the West and seek instead to strengthen and re-trench their own traditional values and beliefs'. Therefore, communities do not passively imbibe global ideals. In some cases they actively resist them as they believe the global ideals and the agents that promote them 'have got it wrong'. Hence, a top-down education/sensitisation strategy, which assumes that once local communities are aware of children's rights principles and different parenting styles they will adapt their own practices, is misleading. Instead, there is a need for dialogue between policy-makers (national and international) and local communities in which both sides are perceived as equal partners whose views require serious consideration. In this way, it may be possible to identify a consensus on abusive and excessive child-rearing practices, which would allow the government to develop stringent and clearly worded laws on these practices, and thus enable enforcement agencies to carry out their mandate with the support of community members and public opinion.

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