

Perceptions and Experiences of Learners on the Banning of Corporal Punishment in South African Schools

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Abstract : The use of corporal punishment is not a new phenomenon in the South African education system as it was, for a long time, recognised as a fitting form of punishment for ill-disciplined and disobedient children. The growing recognition that corporal punishment is an act of violence against children has resulted in the abolishment of this form of punishment in society and particularly in schools. However, regardless of criminalising corporal punishment, it appears to be a disciplinary measure that is persistently used by some educators. Historically and currently, the intimate connection between corporal punishment and discipline has not merely been a convention of human thinking, as this practice is given recognition in various definitions in dictionaries. 'To discipline' is habitually stated to mean 'to punish'. The notion of 'disciplining children' also comes from entrenched common conceptions about children and their relationship with adults. Corporal punishment has, for a long time, been associated with the rearing and education of children, and this practice thus pervades schooling across nations. In many societies, punishment is a term that is closely linked with the self-perception of teachers who feel that they must be 'in control' and have 'the upper hand' in order to be respected. This impression of control is evident in the widespread conception of education which is to 'socialize' children in 'desirable ways' of 'sitting in a formal classroom', 'behaving' in school, 'following instructions' from the teacher, talking only when asked to, and finishing tasks on time. It was against this backdrop that a comprehensive review of relevant literature was undertaken and that individual interviews were conducted with fifty learners from four schools (two junior secondary and two senior secondary schools) in a selected township area in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The main aim of the study was to explore and thus understand learners' views on the administration of corporal punishment regardless of the fact that it was legally abolished. It was envisaged that the interviews with the learners would elicit rich data that would enhance the researcher's insight into their perceptions of the persistent use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure in their schools. The study was thus premised on the assumption, which had been strengthened by anecdotal and media evidence, that corporal punishment was still administered in some schools in South Africa and in schools in the study area in particular.

Keywords : corporal punishment, ban, school learners, South Africa

Conference Title : ICC 2019 : International Conference on Criminology

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : October 07-08, 2019