

The Influence of the Basotho Culture on the Use of Corporal Punishment in the Secondary Schools in Lesotho

Retšelisitsoe Mantoa Matheolane, Alfred Henry Makura

Central University of Technology, Department of Postgraduate Studies: Education, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

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Abstract

This qualitative study sought to determine the influence of Basotho culture in the persistent use of corporal punishment, which is a type of harsh punishment used to control children's disobedience, in Lesotho schools. Lesotho legally abolished the use of corporal punishment in schools. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from head teachers and parents while focus group discussions were used with the learners. Data were analyzed using the thematic approach. Results revealed that corporal punishment was considered a norm within the schools and Basotho society. Additionally, the study found that the use of corporal punishment on children at home, even on toddlers reinforced its use at school. Proverbs were used to justify their use on learners. The use of corporal punishment by teachers was considered normal by the students. The study recommends concerted efforts by key stakeholders in enforcing the laws that proscribe corporal punishment in schools, i.e. parents and learners need to be educated about the sanctity of the law.

Keywords: Rights of the child, bio-ecological theory, Lesotho education act, corporal punishments.

Introduction

Corporal punishment is a form of punitive discipline used to curb children's indiscipline (Zoolotor and Puzia, 2010). It includes slapping, beating, pinching or spanking or any other action that produces physical pain without causing any injuries (Romano, Bell and Norian, 2013). Studies conducted in Lesotho (Pokothoane 2011; Ngakane, Muthukrishna and Ngcobo, 2012; Vihito, 2011; Mosia, 2015) show that corporal punishment is commonly used to curb acts of misbehaviour in Lesotho secondary schools. This occurs despite Lesotho being a signatory to international conventions that proscribe member states from using corporal punishment on children. One of such treaty is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Lesotho signed and ratified the CRC in 1992 (UNICEF, 2005). Article 19 of the CRC states that all state parties should take all the necessary legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation (Shmueli, 2005). Under Article 37 of the CRC, governments are called upon to protect children from all forms of torture, degrading, cruel and inhuman treatment or punishment (Bartman, 2002). The Committee on the Rights of the child, a CRC committee tasked with overseeing the protection of children's rights interprets these Articles of the CRC to be abolishing the use of corporal punishment on children (Imbrogno, 2000). It is in the spirit of upholding children's rights that the Committee on the Rights of the Child conscientises people about the adverse results of corporal punishment on children. It reviews country reports on the provision of children's rights and their protection. After the review of country reports, the committee issues suggestions for improvement (Bartman, 2002). Pioneering adjudications on the use of corporal punishment in the European Court on Human Rights as well as in the constitutional and supreme courts in countries such as the Republic of South Africa, India, Namibia and Zimbabwe were done on the basis of this understanding (Smith, Gallop, Taylor and Marshal, 2005).

The CRC also suggests that children's protection should cover legislative, administrative, social and educational. Article 19 (2) of the CRC stipulates that countries should establish social programmes that provide the necessary support to both the children and their care-takers (UNCRC, 1990). Support to parents, guardians and teachers can be provided through law reforms. Law reforms involve enacting new laws which are in line with the principles of the CRC (Odongo, 2004). Article 28 (2) of CRC indicates that state parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child human dignity and in conformity to the convention (UNCRC, 1990). The Committee on the Rights of the Child interprets this article to be abolishing corporal punishment. According to the committee, corporal punishment does not respect the dignity of the child and it is degrading (Imbrogno, 2000).

In line with its signatory status of the CRC, the government of Lesotho abolished corporal punishment through the 2010 Education Act. The 2010 Education Act (4) states that learners shall not be subjected to cruel, inhumane and degrading punishment (Lesotho Government Gazette Extraordinary, 2010). The Lesotho Education Act of 2010 is in line with articles of CRC. Article 28 (2) of the CRC states that state parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the children's human dignity (UNCRC, 1990).

The 2010 abolition of corporal punishment in Lesotho schools occurred after corporal punishment was used in the country from time in memorial. It is recorded that the use of corporal punishment in Lesotho schools dates back to the colonial period (Director for Education, 1963; Shale, 1945). Recent studies (Matheolane and Makura, 2014; Pokothoane, 2011; Vihito, 2011) on Lesotho education indicate a continued use of corporal punishment despite it being legally abolished. Media reports have also confirmed its prevalence in schools (Lesotho Times Newspaper, 2009). The reasons for this practice appear to be rooted in culture wherein Basotho view it not as punishment *per se* but a routine behaviour modification exercise. Some African societies regard corporal punishment as an accepted cultural practice (Bartman, 2002; Hecker, Hermenau, Isele and Elbert, 2014; Lansford, 2010). Children grow up being beaten and consider it to be a beneficial practice. In such cultures, adults attribute their success to being beaten when they were young (Mugabe and Maphosa, 2011; Shumba, 2011, 2003). Contrarily, a study conducted by Ngussa and Mdalinda (2017) in the Babati Rural District in Tanzania revealed that corporal punishment has a negative Pearson correlation of -206 with learning. This suggests that students who are regularly beaten do not learn well. They are preoccupied with the pain inflicted through

corporal punishment and find it difficult to concentrate. In South Africa, several studies report that some South Africans considered corporal punishment to be part of their culture (Crocker and Pete, 2009; Morrell, 2001(a,b)). People with such positive regard for corporal punishment believe that an African child only behaves appropriately after a good and hard spanking. The pain incurred during corporal punishment deters children from repeating the same mistakes. Similar results were found in Zimbabwe by Shumba (2003). Some teachers support the 'legality' of corporal punishment in schools because of the perception that an African child reacts positively to corporal punishment (Shumba, 2003). Furthermore, a perception of corporal punishment as an accepted cultural practice in Zimbabwe results in the majority of cases of severe caning going unreported. The learners, parents and teachers regard it as a normal practice. Consequently, nobody frowns upon its use (Shumba, 2003). However, recent media reports from Zimbabwe (*The Herald* Newspaper, 23rd March 2019) point to the government's efforts to repeal corporal punishment in that country. The government has drafted a bill which aims at repealing corporal punishment in line with Sections 51 and 53 of the Zimbabwe constitution. Section 51 states that shall uphold individual's right to human dignity while section 53 relates to individual's right to freedom from physical or psychological torture or cruel or inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment (*The Herald* Newspaper, 23rd March 2019). The children's perception of corporal punishment as a norm further influences their reaction when being punished. Children who regard the use of corporal punishment as legitimate positively accept it. They take it to be applied with good intentions and therefore do not develop negative emotions (Garb and Goren, 2010).

The perception of corporal punishment as part of the Basotho culture has been reported by Media outlets in Lesotho (Lesotho Times Newspaper, 2009). A report indicated that the Lesotho upper house of parliament (Senate) was against the legal scrapping of corporal punishment on the grounds that it is a cultural practice in Lesotho. However, there seemed to be paucity of literature on the use of corporal punishment on cultural grounds in Lesotho. The current study is an effort to close this gap.

Corporal punishment and culture

The existence of corporal punishment within African cultures can be seen in the use of proverbs. Proverbs are wise sentences widely known by a community. They contain traditions and morals of the society and are used to caution children from the acts of misconduct. They are utilised to forewarn children of the adverse effects of wrong-doing. Proverbs therefore deter children from engaging in immoral acts (Aboluwodi, 2014; Norrick, 2015; Possa and Makgopa, 2010). Aboluwodi (2014) content that African parents resort to the use of proverbs instead of repeatedly using corporal punishment on children. This is done as corporal punishment is sometimes ineffective. Children repeat the mistakes that they were frequently beaten for, thus rendering corporal punishment counter-productive. Norrick (2015) view proverbs as constituting traditional wisdom that belongs to the community rather than to a person who utters them. Proverbs are memorised and passed from one generation to another. Both the speaker and the listeners have the same understanding of the proverb and they both identify with the community which uses the proverb. The use of proverbs gives the speaker the authority and credibility of a widely held view of the community. The speaker quotes the community proverbs and subsumes the community authority. Listeners do not question the authority communicated by the proverbs. They respond in accordance with the community expectation (Norrick, 2015).

Proverbs contain moral instructions which influence the society. It is because of this influence to the society that proverbs are used as an instrument to control society (Possa and Makgopa, 2010). They are phrased in a manner so appropriate that one feels like there is no better way to express the issue at hand (Possa and Makgopa, 2010; Norrick, 2015).

THEORY

In explaining the contextual factors that appear to sustain the use of corporal punishment in managing discipline in high schools in Lesotho an analysis of Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of Bio-ecological model was used. The Bio-ecological model describes the role of the genetic make-up and the environment in determining human development

throughout their entire life-span (Araujo and Davids, 2009; Eggen and Kauchak, 2010). According to the bio-ecological theory, children's development takes place through interaction between a set of properties [P] and the environment [E] to produce constancy and change in the character of a person over the course of life (McMillan, 1990). Development occurs across a number of human dimensions such as cognition, social competence and temperament. It also occurs over time. Time is important in this case because current development in an individual shapes future outcomes (Sontag, 1996). Interaction is a dynamic, reciprocal, verbal and non-verbal exchange between an individual and other human beings and objects in the immediate environment. It may occur between a teacher and a learner, a child and a parent or an individual and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner also proposed ecological niches (Sontag, 1996). According to Sontag (1996), an ecological niche is a special area in the environment which is particularly favourable or unfavourable to the development of persons with certain characteristics. The concept of an ecological niche implies a consideration of one's personal attributes and interactions with the environment which lead to the full realisation of the individual's potential. This theory is relevant to this study because it explains the influence of proximal as well as distant contextual factors in the development of the child. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006) describe proximal interactions as face to face, immediate and continuous interactions that shape permanent aspects of development. Distant contextual interactions refer to how information ingrained in a child in this manner becomes part of the child's perception. This causes phenomenon such as corporal punishment being viewed as a norm and using it in spite of the fact that it breaches international laws.

The bio-ecological theory gives a detailed explanation of the situation, possible causes, and explains how the solutions implemented in different contexts may benefit a growing child (Bronfenbrenner 1995). The contextual factors of an individual are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem. The contextual subsystems interact with four dimensions of the ecological model, namely: Processes, Person, Context and Time (PPCT (Araujo and Davids 2009; Rosa and Tudge 2013). Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological model is explained diagrammatically through the use of four contextual subsystems [see Fig 1 below]. These subsystems have interactive relationships with individuals (Araujo and Davids, 2009; Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The first element of the model, the processes, indicates daily interactions with objects, symbols, and other individuals in which and with whom one is actively and consistently engaged (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Processes are face to face interactions; this is why they are called proximal processes. Proximal processes involve a two-way movement of energy from an individual to the environment and back again, either sequentially or concurrently. This movement is said to be bi-directional because it moves to and fro. A sequential bi-directional movement emanates from an individual to the environment or vice versa and back while a concurrent movement moves simultaneously between an individual and the environment (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Araujo and Davids, 2009; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield and Karnik, 2009). In this study, the researchers argue that the bi-directional proximal processes explain how the interaction between the learners and the teachers results in the use of corporal punishment. The movement of energy between a learner and the teacher enables a learner to use his/her personality to influence the teacher to use corporal punishment or not to use it. The teachers reciprocate according to their own characteristics.

Studies (Araujo and Davids, 2009; Tudge *et al.*, 2009) have established that proximal processes are a driving force of human development because it is through them that "genetic potentials for effective psychological functioning are actualised" (Bronfenbrenner and Cici, 1994:568). What a child can be is realised through the interaction with an environment. Such interaction ensures that a child is not passive but engages in activities that enable development (Araujo and Davids, 2009). A child actively shapes the environment by eliciting its reactions and responding to them (Darling, 2007). It is through this process that children comprehend the world and their place in it and then play their part by changing and fitting in it. As a result, children develop skills, knowledge and abilities that lead their behaviour across situations (Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

Another important aspect is that individuals develop competence or dysfunctions through these proximal processes. According to Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), competence refers to "demonstrated acquisition and further development of knowledge, skill or ability to conduct and direct one's behaviour across situations and developmental domains" (p118).

Dysfunctions refer to a consistent appearance of problems in maintaining control of behaviour in different situations. A stable environment that has adequate resources promotes competence, while dysfunctions are promoted by unpredictable, insecure and less resourced environment (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Proximal processes lead to competence, if they are frequent and occur over a long time. Interruptions can adversely affect proximal processes. A child has to be introduced to the interactions soon enough to psychologically connect with them. The intensity, which is the strength of the exposure, is also important. A mild, infrequent and unpredictable proximal process leads to dysfunctions (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000). Children are taught how to behave at school. The expectation is for them to develop competences but not dysfunctions. Contrarily, some children consistently engage in unacceptable behaviour, thus reflecting development of dysfunction. In a study conducted in Botswana, Agreement and Keene (2012) concluded that learners engage in acts of misdemeanor being aware that they will be beaten if they get caught. This indicates that learners are not helpless victims in the use of corporal punishment. In the current study, the bio-ecological theory is used to account for the dysfunction seen when learners continue to break school rules and regulations despite being regularly beaten. This theory could assist in explaining the question relating to the factors that explain the use of corporal punishment in the Lesotho high schools.

The second element of bio-ecological model, person, relates to “personal characteristics that individuals bring into any social situation” (Tudge and Odoro-Wanga, 2009:200). The personal characteristics are divided into three forms, which are, demand, resources and force characteristics. Demand characteristics act as stimuli to the environment on first contact. This determines the resultant type of interaction that will follow. Demand characteristics include gender, height, complexion, appearance, age, hyperactivity and passivity. The demand characteristics mildly influence the environment. An individual may impact the environment by simply existing within it, for the environment will react even if one has not done anything. The third element of the bio-ecological theory is the environmental context of an individual. According to Bronfenbrenner (1999) the influence of the contextual factors is substantial on later psychological development of a child. This occurs through putting proximal processes in motion to sustain or reduce opportunities for particular skills, norms, values and customs. An individual’s context is made up of nested circles situated around them. These nested circles represent the microsystem, the mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem (Darling, 2007). The systems are interrelated and affect children in a dynamic way. This suggests that one’s development is affected by proximal and direct as well as distant and indirect environments (Mahoney, Cucciardi, Mallett and Ntoumanis 2014). Figure 1 below reveals the environmental contexts of an individual according, to Bronfenbrenner’s (2006) bio-ecological theory.

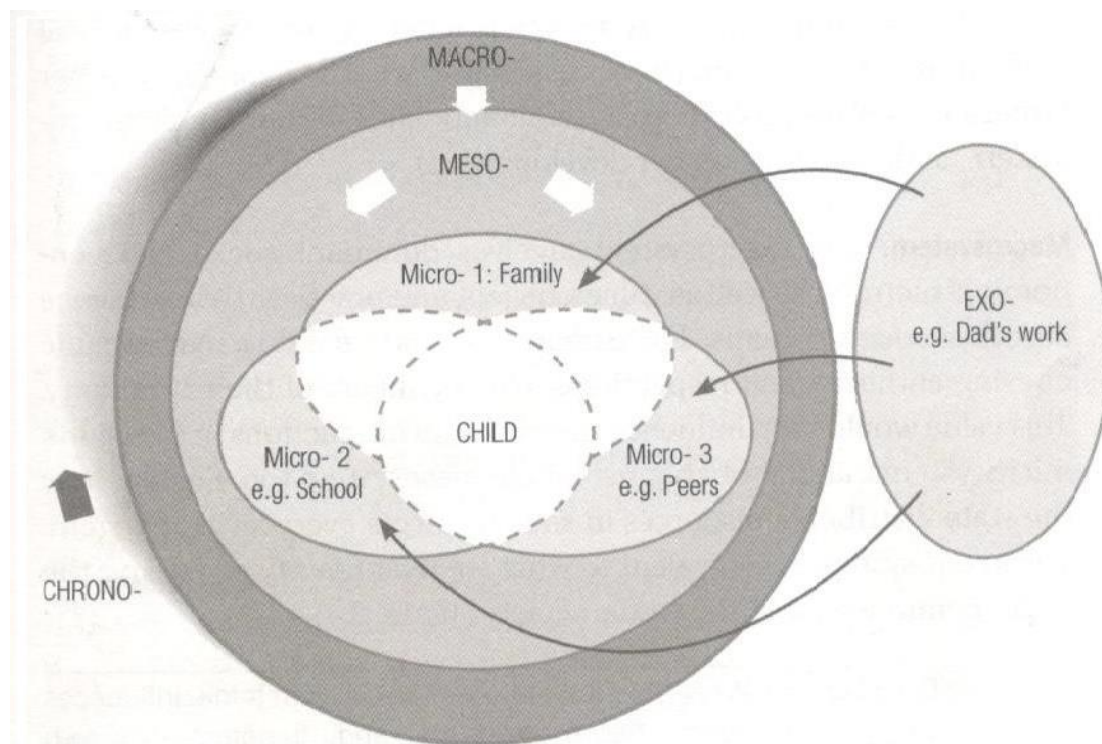


Figure1: Environmental Contexts of an Individual According to Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Theory [Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2006:41]

A microsystem is the most proximal face to face interaction with significant others (Tudge *et al.* 2009). It is the child's immediate context which has specific qualities that influence daily interactions. A microsystem exerts a lot of influence on the developing child because it is a context within which a child spends a lot of time. This situation, in turn, exerts a great influence on the individual in different areas such as emotional, social, cognitive and moral development (Tudge *et al.* 2009; Donald *et al.* 2006). A child's microsystem involves activities, social roles and interpersonal relations of a growing child within a specific context, which are internalised to form internal working models. Internalised working models are representations of the child's relationships and how they operate. They are the beginning of the development of self (McMillan 1990). These activities include all actions that a child can do within a microsystem. Examples of such activities include abiding by or breaching the school rules and regulations, and submitting assignments on time. Social roles are all the interpersonal relationships in the microsystem and examples include the relationship between a teacher and a learner in the classroom. Interpersonal relationships are characterised by a dyad. A dyad in the microsystem interpersonal relationships is the reciprocal engagement between two people. Social roles are activities and relations expected from an individual in a particular setting such as the classroom.

Although the social roles of a child function in the microsystem, they originate in the ideological structures of the macrosystem (Araujo and Davids, 2009). According Mampane, Ebersohn, Cherrington and Moen (2014), children understand the role of parents and teachers who discipline them using harsh punishment. Children accept punishment without any questions because that is how they are raised. The use of punishment is justified by children and the whole community to ensure that African children conform to the rules and expectations of the community (Mampane *et al.*, 2014). Corporal punishment is among social issues that children internalised. They come to know the world as an area where disputes are settled with violent means such as corporal punishment. Because corporal punishment is socially accepted in the African context, children perceive it positively (Mampane *et al.*, 2014). The current study extends the bio-ecological theory by indicating the school stakeholders' attitude towards corporal punishment as well as its influence on the social acceptability of corporal punishment.

According to Sontag (1996), an individual's perception of the interactions in the microsystem influences the out-come of the interactions. Those with powerful meanings to an individual have much power to influence the individual's direction of development. The distinctive characteristic of an individual that a child interacts with influences the out-come of the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This part of the theory is important in the current study because it refers to the perceptions of learners in the context of corporal punishment. It assists in the identification of interactions which have powerful meanings and how these, in turn, affect the learners' perception of corporal punishment. This information is instrumental in responding to the research question: What are learners' perceptions of the alleged prevalence of corporal punishment in the Lesotho high schools? Thus, the norms, values and beliefs of members (such as the parents, the classmates and the classroom teachers) of the microsystem highly influence children in their development. The following paragraphs focus on the parents' influence on the microsystem. The parenting styles used at home influence children's discipline. According to Eggen and Kauchak (2010), authoritarian, rigid and unresponsive parents emphasise conformity. They do not clarify their reasons for upholding particular values and they discourage discussions on issues. Authoritarian parents set high standard of expectations but they are also insensitive to their children. As a result, children from authoritarian families end up developing minimum coping skills and lacking in social skills, as they usually strive to please their parents at the expense of solving problems.

In focusing on punishment, Darling (2007) noted that Bronfenbrenner (1995) found that parents' disciplinary practices on boys are different from those on girls. Disciplinary measures used for girls tend to be softer unlike that used for boys' which tends to be punishment-oriented, more independent and less compliant to social norms. The softer, love-oriented disciplinary measures make girls to be compliant, less autonomous and less able to express themselves. Bronfenbrenner (1985), as quoted by Darling (2007), cautions that wider cultural norms influence the use of punishment, the reaction towards it and the proximal processes involved. A study conducted by Simons and Wurtele (2010) established that there is a positive relationship between acceptance of corporal punishment and its reported use. Adults who were beaten as children are likely to beat their own children. Children who were regularly beaten at home were also found to be in favour of corporal punishment for breaching the rules. This leads to intergenerational transmission of the use of corporal punishment. Therefore, children acquire, from their parents, a positive attitude that corporal punishment is efficient and good for children. Likewise, the interaction between the teacher and the learners was found to be important in influencing the learners' development. The interaction between learners and teachers in the microsystem results in learners absorbing the teachers' values. In South Africa, Payet and Franchi (2010) found that learners supported the use of corporal punishment against learners who misbehave and cause havoc in their schools. Teachers regularly convey their authority and the effectiveness of corporal punishment to learners. Consequently, learners believe in the effectiveness of corporal punishment, just as their teachers do.

The purpose of the study

The current study sought to determine the influence of the Basotho culture on the use of corporal punishment in the Lesotho high schools.

Research questions:

- a) To what extent are teachers influenced by their culture in the use corporal punishment in Lesotho high schools?
- b) How do Lesotho learners perceive the use of corporal punishment by their teachers?

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Paradigm

The current study hinges on social constructivism. Social constructivism perceives reality as built within the social context. People construct meanings through their experiences and interactions within their societies. Consequently, studying a phenomenon within its natural settings provides opportunity to understand participants' perceptions on their activities in relations to the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Population

The population of the study consisted of all the head-teachers, learners and parents of all the secondary school going learners in Lesotho. The head-teachers were relevant in this study because they are charged with ensuring that the schools abide by the laws. Learners were important because they observe the application of corporal punishment in schools. Parents were important in that they are the custodians of culture in the country. They were in a position to comment on the relationship between culture and corporal punishment.

Sampling and sampling techniques

Ten head-teachers, ten parents and ten learners were sampled in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select all the participants. Head-teachers from five schools in the rural areas and another five schools in the urban areas were selected. Ten parents, who have children in the said secondary schools, were engaged in the study. The sample was drawn from both rural and urban areas. Two learners' focus groups were selected from two of the ten schools whose head-teachers participated. The two groups comprised form B (Form 2 or grade 9) and D (Form 4/grade 10) learners. Both boys and girls participated in each group.

Instruments

The researchers developed semi-structured interview schedules for the head-teachers and parents. A focus group discussion guide for learners was also developed.

Data collection procedure

The first researcher made an appointment with the participants and conducted the interviews. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed before they were analysed. Interviews with the parents were conducted in Sesotho and the responses were translated into English.

Ethical issues

This study recognised the ethical issues in research. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants before they were requested to participate. Participants were further informed that they could participate out of their volition and that they could withdraw their participation at any point. The participants who agreed to participate were requested to sign consent forms. Participants were further assured that their identity would remain confidential and the information collected will only be used for academic purposes. Requests were further sought from parents to allow their children (minors) to participate in the study. To protect the participants' identity, pseudo-names were used for the participants and the schools.

Data analysis techniques

Thematic data analysis was used to analyse data collected through the interviews. Data were transcribed verbatim and then arranged and sorted to discern themes. Themes that were relevant to the research questions were identified (Babbie, 2014; Bryman, 2012).

RESULTS

The following themes emerged from the data collected: Corporal punishment is considered to be a norm in Lesotho and proverbs are used to support the use of corporal punishment.

The regard of corporal punishment as a norm

The use of corporal punishment at home explains the belief that corporal punishment was a cultural practice. MrBereng, the head-teacher at Kamele high school said that teachers used corporal punishment at school because it was in line with its use at home. He went further to explain that teachers did not want to introduce new ways of discipline at school, because this could clash with home discipline.

MrMalepa, a head-teacher at Letlapeng high school, remembered a Basotho norm where the mother uses a light cane to discipline a toddler. The significance of a light cane disciplining a toddler was to show that a stick was used on children early in life. The head-teachers emphasised that teachers assume a role of being parents when children are at school, hence their duty to utilise corporal punishment, as parents would do.

Learners reiterated head-teachers' views on the use of corporal punishment as part of the Basotho norms. Lehlohonolo, a learner at Kamele High School explained: "*teachers beat us, just as our parents do at home.*" This indicates that corporal

punishment is common both at school and at home.

The use of Basotho proverbs to support the use of corporal punishment in schools

It emerged that head-teachers considered corporal punishment as part of the Basotho culture. All the ten head-teachers supported the view that corporal punishment was part of the Basotho culture. Of the ten head-teachers, seven quoted the Basotho proverbs: “*Thupa e otolloa e sa le metsi*” [a stick is straightened while it is still wet]. They explained that this proverb means that children have to be beaten while they are still tender so that they behave appropriately. The second idiom that was referred to was “*Ha u sautloe ha u joetsoa, u tlautloakaletlalo*” [if you cannot respond when being told, you will respond well with pain]. This was taken to mean that pain caused by beating was efficient as a disciplinary measure.

Learners’ focus groups also revealed that learners saw the use of corporal punishment at school to be in line with the cultural practices. All the participating groups referred to the same proverb that their head-teachers talked about. Potlako, a form B learner from Kamele High School, explained: “*Ha motho a sautloe ha a joetsoa o utloakaletlalo*” [if one does not understand when they are told, he/she understands better if he/she is beaten]. Likengkeng said: “*akere Basotho ba re thupa e otolloa e a sa le metsi*” [isn’t it that Basotho have a saying that ‘a stick is straightened while still wet’]. Parents reiterated the learners’ and the head-teachers’ perceptions on the use of proverbs to substantiate the use of corporal punishment. Mrs.Molele, one of the parents explained:

Eethupakemoetlooa Basotho.Akeraan ale nthoe e rengthupa e otolloa e sa le metsi. E bolelanghore ha u sakhalemelengoanaa sa le monyane ha a se a le moholo o u tlalamatsoho. U lokelahore u mokhaleme , umo shape a sa le monyane. [Yes it is part of the Basotho culture. There is this saying that a stick is straightened while it is still wet. It means that a child needs to be reprimanded while still young. If you don’t do that she/he will be difficult to handle].

This indicates that the head-teachers, parents and learners regard corporal punishment as part of the Basotho culture. Its use does not raise any eyebrows. It is accepted as a good practice.

Specific proverbs justifying corporal punishment use within the Basotho culture

Proverbs influence various aspects of the Basotho lives, including corporal punishment. The following proverbs related to the use of corporal punishment within the Basotho culture were cited by some of the respondents.

“*Thupa ke mosesetso, mmele ke koae oa hlomela*” [A stick is a medicine and the body is a crop that will grow again (Parent Moloi)]. This proverb means that a stick is a medicine for indiscipline and the body heals after being beaten. It suggests that the act of misconduct that children commit may be curbed using corporal punishment and the pain caused by such beating will heal

The second proverb on corporal punishment within the Basotho society is:

“*Thupa e otolloa e sa le metsi*” [A stick is straightened while it is still wet].

This proverb indicates that one should take advantage of the most favourable conditions to shape the course of events. This especially applies to bringing the child up. Thirdly, Basotho have a proverb: “*Ha u sa utloe ha u joetsoa u tla utloa ka letlalo*” (Parent Moloi). [If you do not understand when being told, you will respond when you feel the pain]. This proverb means that if one is stubborn and does not listen when being told; the pain caused by any problem that may be encountered because of ignoring a warning or corporal punishment that he/she may receive makes him/her to behave accordingly.

These proverbs show a positive perception of corporal punishment. They demonstrate that applying corporal punishment is helpful in curbing indiscipline.

DISCUSSION

Perception of corporal punishment as a norm

The use of corporal punishment at home was used to explain the belief that corporal punishment was a cultural practice. Mr. Bereng, a head-teacher at Kamele high school said that they used corporal punishment at school because it

was in line with its use at home. He went further to explain that they did not want to introduce new ways of discipline at school, which could clash with home discipline. Mr. Malepa, a head-teacher at Letlapeng high school, remembered a Basotho norm where a mother uses “lesoai”, a light cane to discipline a toddler. The significance of a light cane disciplining a toddler was to show that a stick was used on children early in life. This finding goes with what Crocker and Pete (2009) found in South Africa. People with a positive regard for corporal punishment believe that an African child only behaves appropriately after a good, hard spanking. The pain incurred during corporal punishment deters children from repeating the same mistakes. Similar results were found in Zimbabwe where teachers support the legality of corporal punishment in schools because of the perception that an African child reacts positively to corporal punishment (Shumba, 2003). Furthermore, a perception of corporal punishment as an accepted cultural practice in Zimbabwe results in the majority of cases going unreported. The learners, parents and teachers regard it as a normal practice and, therefore, there is no need to report it. The use of corporal punishment at school is on the basis of its use at home (Shumba, 2003).

Use of proverbs

It emerged from data in the current study that head-teachers and parents perceived corporal punishment as part of the Basotho culture. All the ten head-teachers supported the view that corporal punishment was part of the Basotho culture. The ten parents who participated on the study echoed the head-teachers’ perceptions. The proverb such as “thupa e otolloa e sa le metsi” (*a stick is straightened while still wet*) were used to support the administration of corporal punishment in the classroom. The head-teachers explained that this idiom meant that children have to be beaten while they were still young so that they behaved appropriately. Mokitimi (1991) is of the opinion that the proverb “thupa e otolloa e sa le metsi” (*a stick is straightened while still wet*) applies to bringing the child up. It is only when child is in her/his prime age that he/she should be socialised into acceptable norms. This indicates that parents and teachers should take advantage of the most favourable conditions to shape the course of the child’s life. This socialisation suggests that a stick is used to discipline children.

The second proverb that was referred to was “ha u sa utloe ha u joetsoa, u tla utloa ka letlalo” (*If one cannot respond when being told, they respond well with pain*). This was taken to mean that pain caused by beating was efficient as a disciplinary measure. Similar idioms were used by learners such as Potlako from Kamele High School to justify the use of corporal punishment. This finding corroborates the use of the proverbs within the Basotho culture. Proverbs are memorized morals lessons which influence the society. It is because of their influence to the society that they are used as an instrument to control society (Possa and Mokgopa, 2010). As Norrick (2015) contends proverbs carry the traditional wisdom that belongs to the community rather than to a person who utters them. Both the speaker and the listeners have the same understanding of the proverb and they both identify with the community which uses the proverb. This suggests that when proverbs that support corporal punishment are uttered, the listeners agree with them. In the case of corporal punishment in Lesotho, proponents use proverbs to justify the administration of corporal punishment in schools. This method of justification is effective because proverbs are effective in expressing ideas.

The use of proverbs to support the use of corporal punishment in Lesotho contradicts Aboluwodi’s (2014) perception of proverbs. According to Aboluwodi (2014) proverbs are utilised to forewarn children of the adverse effects of wrongdoing. Parents resort to the use of proverbs instead of repeatedly using corporal punishment on children. Contrarily, Basotho use proverbs to enforce the use of corporal punishment.

The application of corporal punishment in Lesotho schools contradicts the laws. The 2010 Lesotho Education Act bars teachers from applying corporal punishment on learners. The proverbs and the norms of the Basotho on the other hand encourage its use for disciplinary purposes. This suggests a conflict between the traditions of the Basotho and the laws. The laws formulated on the basis of human rights are new to the Basotho society compared to the proverbs and norms which have been in function since time in memorial. The proverbs and the norms seemingly form a barrier against the implementation of the laws.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the Basotho culture on the use of corporal punishment in the Lesotho high schools. Data collected revealed that parents, head-teachers and learners regarded corporal punishment as part of the Basotho culture. They used the Basotho proverbs on corporal punishment to prove that it is part of the culture. The use of corporal punishment on children at home, even on toddlers reinforced its use at school. The head-teachers, parents and learners regard corporal punishment as part of the Basotho culture and there was nothing untoward its persistent usage.

Recommendations

Having found that the Basotho culture maintains the use of corporal punishment in secondary schools, it is recommended that the government has to increase its efforts in enforcing the laws on corporal punishment. The new 2010 Education Act, which abolished the use of corporal punishment on learners, challenges a widely-held view of the effectiveness of corporal punishment. The country cannot afford to have ineffective laws which are breached in the name of culture. This necessitates increased effort by the government to discipline teachers that break the law. Parents and learners need to be educated about the sanctity of law. This will enable them to report any breach of the law so that culprits are duly disciplined.

Discussions on corporal punishment law in societies still practicing it need to be initiated. This should be at home, at school and on media outlets. This will allow debates on the laws at different levels. Such debates are important in providing information on the merits and demerits of corporal punishment. They can also facilitate change of attitude on the use of corporal punishment.

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