



NIMR

National Institute for Medical
Research, Tanzania



POLICY BRIEF

Adopting Positive Disciplinary Methods in Tanzanian Schools

KEY MESSAGES

- Violence against children and adolescents is a serious human right, social and public health issue. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of children in Tanzania reported experiencing physical violence by a relative, authority figure (such as teachers) or an intimate partner before the age of 18.
- Corporal punishment is one type of physical violence used as a form of discipline that is commonly and lawfully practiced in Tanzanian schools
- Empateach, a positive discipline intervention trial for schools, which used classroom management and alternative discipline strategies reduced fear and anxiety, increased student-teacher interaction, improved attendance, enhanced academic performance, and decreased dropouts.
- This policy brief recommends to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to make a law reform to end corporal punishment by introducing positive discipline through behavioural interventions to teachers in Tanzania schools.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence against children and adolescents represents a significant violation of human rights, a pervasive social concern, and a critical public health issue. Within Tanzanian schools, corporal punishment

persists as a prevalent and legally sanctioned form of disciplinary practice. However, extensive evidence has shown that such disciplinary methods have deleterious consequences for students, encompassing adverse effects

on mental health, strained student-teacher relationships, decreased attendance, and diminished academic performance, among other detrimental outcomes. Encouragingly, intervention trials conducted globally, including sub-Saharan Africa, have demonstrated the effectiveness of positive discipline approaches in reducing violence against students. This policy brief highlights the transformative impact of the Empateach intervention trial implemented in Nyarugusu Camp, Tanzania, where teachers actively participated in empathy-building exercises, collaborative group work, and the acquisition of self-regulation techniques, positive disciplinary strategies, and well-being promotion methodologies. Based on the resounding success of this initiative, the policy brief strongly recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology undertake legislative reforms to eradicate corporal punishment, replacing it with positive discipline practices facilitated through comprehensive

behavioral interventions for teachers across Tanzanian schools.

THE PROBLEM

Violence against children and adolescents is a serious human right, social and public health issue. The World Health Organization defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Rutherford et al., 2007). Violence includes all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, including sexual abuse, bullying in schools and corporal punishment (United Nations Children's Fund, 2005). Sustainable Development Goals number 5 and 16 advocates for elimination of all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, (Heekes, Kruger, Lester, & Ward, 2022). The 2009 Tanzania Violence against

Children Study (VACS) survey indicated that almost three quarters of both females and males reported experiencing physical violence by a relative, authority figure (such as teachers) or an intimate partner before the age of 18 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2011). Studies have shown that violence experienced before the age of 18 years old is linked with increased risk of various adverse future outcomes such as depression, suicide attempts, violence victimization and perpetration and poor academic outcomes schools (Boden, Horwood & Ferguson 2007, Devries et al., 2014, Norman et al., 2012).

School is one of the most common settings where children experience different forms of violence, including violent discipline as a form of punishment (Devries et al., 2018; Heekes, Kruger, Lester, & Ward, 2022), with most common perpetrators of violence against children being school staff (Devries et al., 2018). In many African countries, teachers, parents and communities hold social beliefs that physical

punishment is an effective and necessary means to control students' behaviour (Addison, 2015; Clarke et al., 2016; Masath et al., 2020; Thakuri, 2004), with teachers believing that without corporal punishment classrooms will be out of control (Addison, 2015). Even where corporal punishment is prohibited in schools by law, it still manifests in many settings (Glass et al., 2018). Studies in South Africa and Tanzania have demonstrated that according to norms and cultural values, using a stick to whip a child is not perceived as violence and is instead viewed as a normal practice for discipline, except when beating is perceived as 'extreme' (Hoosen et al., 2022; Fay, 2016).

Corporal punishment is lawful in schools for both boys and girls under the Education (Corporal Punishment) Regulations under the National Education Act 1978 in mainland Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania, 1978). National surveys conducted in Tanzania and Kenya showed that more than 40% of adolescents have experienced

violence from an authority figure mostly teachers (UNICEF Tanzania et al., 2011 & UNICEF Kenya et al., 2012). In Tanzania, violent disciplining prevails due to regulations imposed related to corporal punishment (Masath et al., 2020). Evidence indicates violence is being experienced by many children in schools in Nyarugusu camp in Tanzania (Warue Kiriuki, & Angoye 2018). A study conducted in Nyarugusu camp showed that physical and sexual violence were perceived as common and unacceptable forms of violence by both parents and students (Fletcher, Gitter, Wilhelm 2018).

Positive discipline is an approach that teaches children and guides their behaviors, while respecting their rights to healthy development, protection from violence and participation in their learning and care (Global Partnership to End Violence 2022). To assess the effectiveness of positive discipline in schools, An Empateach intervention, a school-based peer led behavioural intervention to

reduce teachers' use of physical violence against students was introduced in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania. Teachers were engaged in empathy- building exercises and group work to learn and practice self-regulation techniques, positive disciplinary methods, and strategies to promote well-being. The results indicated that teachers widely reported positive outcomes with the EmpaTeach that equipped them with useful and acceptable classroom management and alternative discipline strategies such as use of counselling sessions, praise and rewards systems, and facilitated joint discussions between teachers, students and parents, and enabled them to reflect on their own values and experiences of using corporal punishment. Students noticed the positive changes on the way they were being disciplined by teachers as opposed to previous use of corporal punishment. Only a few teachers reported adamant use of corporal punishment attributable to children's misconduct, and strong beliefs that beating was

an important measure to disciplining students for positive outcome.

Similar interventions such as the Irie Classroom Toolbox, Good School Toolkit, and Interaction Competencies with Children for Teachers (ICC-T), which also aim to promote positive disciplinary practices and shift school culture, have proven effective in reducing violence from teachers towards students in non-humanitarian settings. In Jamaica, the Irie Classroom Toolbox intervention which trained teachers in managing classroom behavior through workshops and in-class support, demonstrated a decrease in teacher-inflicted violence on children (Baker-Henningham et al., 2021). The Good School Toolkit in Uganda provided training to teachers in empathy, non-violent discipline, and new behavioral skills leading to improved student-teacher relationship, empowering students to voice their opinions, and reduced fear of teachers and corporal punishment (Devries et al., 2015; Kyegombe et al., 2017).

In Tanzania, the ICC-T intervention focusing on training teachers in effective teacher-student interaction, discipline strategies, and support for overwhelmed students, significantly decreased use of physical and emotional violence by teachers (Nkuba et al., 2018). These evidence-based intervention trials, along with the Empateach program, underscore the importance of revising existing policies to incorporate non-corporal punishment as an alternative disciplinary approach. The interventions demonstrate that training teachers in positive disciplinary methods can reduce violence against students and enhance the overall school environment.

POLICY OPTIONS

End corporal punishment policy by introducing positive disciplinary methods in schools

1. Initiate a comprehensive law reform process by revising the Education (Corporal Punishment) Regulations 1979 under the National Education Act 1978 in mainland Tanzania

to unequivocally end corporal punishment in Tanzanian schools and alternatively,

2. Introduce and adopt positive disciplinary approaches such as counselling sessions, praise and rewards systems, facilitated joint discussions between teachers, students and parents, as well as strategies to control and manage stress and emotions among school teachers. The intervention produced positive outcomes for students, including reduced fear and anxiety, increased student-teacher interaction, improved attendance, enhanced academic performance, and decreased dropout rates. Consequently, it is a cost-effective and feasible intervention for implementation in Tanzanian schools.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Implement the intervention step-wise by scaling up the intervention in non-humanitarian settings for more generalizability
2. Involve education stakeholders such as government officials, local leaders, and non-governmental organizations who are indirectly interested and impacted by the education system to effect positive discipline measures to students in Tanzania schools.
3. Promoting awareness of positive discipline to school committees, parents and other community members
4. Promotion of inclusion (parents, teachers, students, other community members) in understanding and adopting positive discipline measures to students in Tanzania schools.

Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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