Physical Punıshment Against Children in Türkiye: The Necessıty of Alternative Discipline Methods

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to examine the prevalence of corporal punishment against children in Türkiye and the negative effects of this practice on children's physical and psychological health. Corporal punishment is considered as a disciplinary method that harms children's development and leads to long-term negative consequences. Studies conducted in Türkiye show that physical violence against children at home is at an alarming level and is accepted as a cultural norm. The study discusses how corporal punishment disrupts children's emotional and social development and how such punishments can lead to permanent traumas in children. The necessity of alternative discipline methods is emphasised and it is explained how positive discipline contributes to children's self-control, healthy relationships and positive behaviours. In conclusion, the importance for parents and educators to adopt and implement positive discipline methods instead of corporal punishment is emphasised. These methods contribute positively to both individual development and social adaptation of children.

KEYWORDS: Physical Violence, Corporal Punishment, Positive Discipline

INTRODUCTION

Many of the actions that can be considered within the scope of child abuse initially started with the aim of disciplining the child and can reach the extremes of physical punishment (Polat, 2016; Visser et al., 2022). Corporal punishment is a method in which physical force is used to control the child's behaviour and the child is targeted to suffer (Runyan et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2018).

Corporal punishment is a very common disciplinary method worldwide and is associated with social norms perceived by society. The effects of corporal punishment applied to children can also be seen at older ages. In adulthood, negative consequences of corporal punishment experienced in childhood may occur. Corporal punishment and maltreatment of children bring many risks (Fleckman et al., 2019).

The normalisation of physical violence by caregivers while raising children reduces the value of children in society and increases the risk of exposure to other forms of violence. It may also cause the child to normalise violence and use it as a tool. The idea that corporal punishment is necessary in the process of raising or educating children still prevails in some countries. Corporal punishment includes a range of negative behaviours such as slapping/throwing, ear pulling, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, hitting with an object, poking, pushing, back slapping, throwing an object. Punishment methods may differ according to cultures, but the most common one is beating (Ember & Ember, 2005).

The aim of this study is to examine why the use of corporal punishment in child discipline is wrong and the negative effects of this practice on children. While evaluating the current situation regarding the frequency of corporal punishment of children in Türkiye, it also aims to examine alternative discipline methods and positive discipline approaches that can replace corporal punishment. Furthermore, by discussing the positive effects of these alternative methods on children's development and their application areas, more effective and child-friendly discipline strategies are suggested for parents and educators.

CORPORAL PUNİSHMENT AS A DİSCİPLİNE METHOD

The concept of discipline has different meanings from one society to another depending on cultural values. In some societies, discipline is associated with control and strict rules to be followed, while in other societies it is thought that the individual should develop his/her own internal discipline and self-control. However, in our country, discipline is associated with strict rules and punishment methods especially in child education. Physical punishment, i.e. beating, is at the top of these punishment methods. The

process usually starts with scolding and frightening the child for misbehaviour, but this method loses its effect over time and is replaced by beating. This situation turns into physical abuse and causes both physical and psychological harm to the child.

In Türkiye, physical abuse against children is not perceived as an important issue and even physical punishment against children has a traditional place in our culture. In fact, this point of view is such that 'He who does not beat his daughter beats his knee', 'Where the mother beats, the rose ends.', 'Beating is out of heaven.', 'Do you have a daughter, you have a problem.', 'Let him who gives birth to a son boast, let him who gives birth to a daughter boast.', 'His hair is long, his mind is short.', 'Where the teacher hits, the rose ends.', 'It is easy to ride a low donkey, it is easy to beat an orphan child.', 'He who beats his child beats his seven umbilical grandchildren.', 'Three days of beating is one meal.', 'The fears of those who are trained with a stick are greater than their hopes.', It is also reflected in our proverbs and idioms with expressions such as.

Discipline is a part of our lives, but it is important how it is understood and what kind of discipline methods are used. Discipline methods are necessary for the child to be protected from dangers and to take responsibility. Discipline and control mechanisms aim to help the child's development and provide him/her with a system of values. A positive understanding of discipline ensures that the child behaves honestly.

Positive discipline is achieved by teaching and supporting the child instead of forcing the child to obey (Durrant et al., 2017). Raising a child is a complex process. Simply loading information and teaching rules is an incomplete education model. In addition to knowledge and rules, the child must receive love and support. The aim here is to raise the child with internal discipline. Internal discipline is possible when the child acts on his/her own judgement and lives by his/her own will, not by fear. In this system, instead of punishing negative behaviour so that the child can distinguish right from wrong, it is essential to explain the situation in a language that the child can understand and turn it into a learning experience. In this way, internal discipline develops in the child (Durrant, 2019). The aim is for the child to internalise the right behaviours and to be motivated to do these behaviours. The child should understand why certain behaviours are expected and why others are undesirable. The desire to do the right and appropriate behaviours should develop spontaneously in the child. When this develops, the child will understand the effects of his/her behaviour on others and will develop empathy. The main component of this model, called positive discipline, is communication. Especially the correct communication with parents, teachers and caregivers is very important. In this communication, feelings of love and trust should be at the forefront.

The child's feeling of self-worth is ensured by rewarding positive behaviours. The attitude of parents in an environment based on love and trust is of great importance for the child to see himself/herself as a valuable individual and to develop self-esteem. In this way, the child is less likely to engage in negative behaviours and a healthy communication ground is created for both parent and child. An environment of love and trust also involves a consistent approach by the parents.

In the punishment-based discipline model, the child exhibits positive behaviours to avoid punishment. In this model, the child fulfils the expectations of adults due to fear, which prevents the development of intrinsic motivation. Punishment may stop unwanted behaviour in the short term, but in the long term it prevents the formation of internal discipline. Punishment only teaches the child to avoid punishment and does not allow the desired behaviour to be taught.

Whether corporal punishment is necessary or not is still debated. The acceptance rate of corporal punishment, which used to be seen as a necessary disciplinary method, is gradually decreasing. As the child gets older, the likelihood of being subjected to corporal punishment decreases, but many parents continue this method until adolescence. Studies show that boys are exposed to corporal punishment more than girls (Saunders & Goddard, 2010). There are also studies showing that there is no difference in terms of income level in terms of applying corporal punishment (Afifi et al., 2019). Mothers were found to use corporal punishment more than fathers. Corporal punishment is more common in single-parent families.

PHYSİCAL PUNİSHMENT AND ITS EFFECTS

Children who are disciplined with physical punishment grow up believing that brute force is an effective and correct method to solve problems. This situation can lead to the false belief that violence can be used against defenseless and weak people and can cause them to turn to violence in adulthood. In this way, abuse incidents continue from generation to generation (Ayan, 2007; Greydanus et al., 2002; İzmirli, 2003; Kutlu et al., 2007; Mahiroğlu & Buluç, 2003; Mayda et al., 2006; NCCR, 2001; Polat, 2001; Şahin & Beyazova, 2001).

According to a study conducted by Mayda et al. (2006), it was determined that children of mothers and fathers who were exposed to violence in their childhood were subjected to more violence than those whose parents were not exposed to violence. In a study by Deveci and Açık (2002), it was determined that children who were exposed to physical violence were more likely to get into fights involving physical violence than those who were not exposed, that they saw physical violence as an effective method of solving problems and that they considered it normal to beat their own children in the future. Children who were subjected to physical punishment were more likely to experience anxiety, fear, helplessness and feelings of worthlessness, sleep and speech disorders, tics (Bilir et al., 1991; Gershoff, 2002; İzmirli, 2003) and aggression, delinquency and antisocial behavior (Ayan, 2007; Bilir et al., 1991; Feigelman, 2009; Gershoff, 2002; Knox, 2010).

Physıcal Punıshment Agaınst Chıldren in Türkıye: The Necessıty of Alternatıve Dıscıplıne Methods

In a study by Bulut (2010), it was found that girls who were exposed to physical violence experienced more feelings of guilt and fear, while boys experienced more feelings of anger and shame. In a study by Deveci, Karadağ, and Yılmaz (2008), children expressed their feelings of sadness, fear, bad feelings, revenge, and excitement in the face of violence. Physical punishment causes the child to feel humiliated and helpless, to experience a sense of inferiority, and to lose self-esteem (Gündüz and Gökçakan, 2004; İzmirli, 2003; Mahiroğlu and Buluç, 2003; Mangır et al., 1996; Şahin and Beyazova, 2001). Children who are subjected to physical punishment can direct their anger towards objects or other children around them and can develop an insecure personality (İzmirli, 2003; Mahiroğlu and Buluç, 2003; Mangır et al., 1996; Greydanus et al., 2002; NCCR, 2001). After physical punishment, the child learns to make more effort to avoid being caught. The child who avoids being caught can learn to act sneakily, to be defensive and deceitful (Başcı, 2007; İzmirli, 2003; Mahiroğlu and Buluç, 2003).

Children who are subjected to physical punishment do not hesitate to behave negatively again, thinking that they have paid the price for their wrong behavior (İzmirli, 2003). According to the study conducted by Mahiroğlu and Buluç (2003), it was determined that 43.5% of the children who were subjected to physical punishment did not improve their behavior, while 41.5% of their behaviors worsened. Children who are frequently subjected to physical punishment have certain common characteristics. These children avoid contact with adults and are afraid of being touched or approached by an adult (Bilir et al., 1991; Gershoff, 2002; İzmirli, 2003). They are clearly afraid of their parents, can easily tell lies, remain unresponsive to frightening situations, and do not cry easily. They become anxious when they hear another child cry. They can be overly aggressive or overly introverted and shy (Bilir et al., 1991). Peer relationships are weak and school success is low (İzmirli, 2003; Başçı, 2007). It is known that physical punishment is not successful in education and that positive motivation methods such as praise and reward are more effective. Physical punishment causes students to be afraid of school, lose their self-confidence, worsen their behavior, increase aggressive and destructive attitudes, disrupt classroom order, and increase negative behaviors such as damaging objects, defying teachers, and lying (Şahin and Beyazova, 2001).

In the study conducted by Mahiroğlu and Buluç (2003), it was determined that 60% of the students who were subjected to physical punishment developed negative attitudes towards school and lessons, while 29.6% did not change their attitudes. The first step in protecting children from violence is to accept the existence of violence. Approaches such as "Such things do not happen in our country" or "This much beating does not count as violence" are denial of violence. Although it is known that physical punishment is widely used in our country, detailed studies are needed on its dimensions (Şahin and Beyazova, 2001). In order for our children, who will be the adults of the future, to become healthy individuals and raise healthy generations, it is possible for mothers and fathers to stay away from violence and exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors that can be a model for them (Ayan, 2007). Rapid urbanization and economic instability in Turkish society are factors that trigger violence. Violence becomes permanent through learning, observation, imitation and repetition. If the models around the child contain violence, the child also learns violent actions and statements. In Türkiye, the perception of violence against children as a means of disciplining the child and the legitimacy of this both within the family and in the public sphere leads to the reproduction and concealment of violence (Bulut, 2010). Aggression and violence are learned behaviors and if timely intervention is not made or necessary precautions are not taken, they can cause irreversible problems in the social structure in the long term (Ayan, 2007).

Effective and desired discipline can only occur in a parent-child communication environment where the child feels loved and safe. Parental behaviors that occur in an environment based on love and trust play an important role in the child's perception of himself as a valuable individual and the development of his self-esteem (İzmirli, 2003).

RESEARCH ON PHYSİCAL ABUSE İN TÜRKİYE

Data on corporal punishment and abuse against children in Türkiye show that the number of children exposed to violence and ill-treatment has reached significant levels. According to a study conducted by Boğaziçi University, 22.50% of parents who use aggressive behaviour towards their children resort to corporal punishment. It was observed that 53.8% of the mothers who applied punishment to their children preferred slapping or spanking and 23.1% preferred beating (Kara et al., 2010). 92% of the children stated that they were subjected to corporal punishment by their parents, 22.8% by their teachers or other school personnel and 24.4% by older children at their school (Bulut, 2010).

It was observed that 43.5% of the children's behaviour did not improve in physical violence used to discipline children, while 41.5% of the children's behaviour showed more negative variability (Deveci et al., 2008). In a different result of the same study, it was observed that 60% of the children who were punished with physical violence had a negative impact on their educational life, while 29.6% had no change (Deveci et al., 2008).

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), 217,915 children were registered as victims of crime in 2022. Of these children, 61.3% were victims of injury and 11.8% were victims of sexual offences. In total, more than 2 million children applied to

security units as victims between 2015 and 2023. According to data from the International Children's Centre (ICC), cases of sexual abuse against children have increased in Türkiye over the years. Ministry of Justice data reveals that more than 66,000 investigations were opened into child sexual abuse in 2023, a two-fold increase compared to 2015.

According to a 2019 UNICEF study, 19 per cent of children in Türkiye experience serious physical violence. Furthermore, a 2021 study found that 40 per cent of children had been subjected to corporal punishment by teachers or family members. Such punishments are often seen as a disciplinary tool, but have long-term negative effects on children's psychological and physical health. 40% of children have been subjected to corporal punishment by their teachers or family members (Tiryaki & Tüfekçi, 2023).

The Kadir Has University 2021 Family Survey reported that more than 50% of families consider it normal to use slapping or mild violence to discipline their children. However, it was concluded that these practices may lead to behavioural disorders in children and aggression in the future.

CORPORAL PUNİSHMENT AND POSİTİVE DİSCİPLİNE

Corporal punishment is a method applied by using physical force to correct children's unwanted behaviours. Although this approach may seem to give quick results in the short term, in the long term it may damage the child's self-confidence, normalise violence and lead to psychological problems. On the other hand, positive discipline is a method applied by encouraging the child's positive behaviours and helping the child understand negative behaviours. Positive discipline supports the child's emotional and social development, increases self-confidence and aims to raise healthier individuals in the long term. Although it requires more time and patience, the long-term benefits of positive discipline far outweigh the negative effects of corporal punishment.

The main task of parents is to guide and protect their children. This includes teaching their children the skills to control themselves and to interact positively with the world in which they live. Positive discipline methods help parents to help their children acquire these skills during their development. It is the role of parents to provide the guidance and discipline necessary for children to distinguish right from wrong and to cope with the difficulties they face in life. With these methods, children exhibit positive behaviours not in order to escape punishment, but by internalising these behaviours.

Children raised with positive discipline are generally happy and successful. Desirable behaviour patterns emerge as part of the child's normal development through experience of life events. The role of parents is to ensure that these behaviours are internalised and to create an environment in which children enjoy the process. In the course of the child's development, behaviours such as sharing, work habits, empathy, as well as negative behaviours such as stealing or lying, should be taught to behave according to principles.

Corporal punishment may start with the idea of disciplining children and may extend to the extent of abuse. Straus and Gelles (1986) show that the high rates of physical abuse in the society indicate that most of the physical punishment applied by parents is within the scope of physical abuse. In order to determine whether a punishment is abuse, it should be examined whether the behaviour is traumatic for the child and whether it creates permanent effects. The consequences of both physical and psychological trauma are important.

No parent wants to hit their child, but parents who want to punish negative behaviour and prepare well-behaved adults for the future may ignore the long-term effects of corporal punishment. Children who are constantly exposed to corporal punishment are more likely to develop problems such as criminal behaviour, violent tendencies, depression and substance abuse.

Corporal punishment is a risk factor for physical abuse. Therefore, the importance of primary prevention activities should be emphasised to prevent violence and other problems. In the prevention of violence in society, raising awareness of parents about the harms of corporal punishment used for the purpose of disciplining children should be the main goal. Zigler and Hall (1989) state that the problem of abuse can be solved by changing social attitudes.

Physical abuse can cause injuries in children and disciplinary methods such as beatings seem to have a great effect. Timely detection of child abuse is critical in preventing bad outcomes. Rapid diagnosis allows to avoid the progression of the incident and situations that may result in death. Especially in cases of domestic violence, early detection is important to prevent harm to other siblings in the household. For this reason, it is always necessary to consider possible situations of abuse.

Therefore, parents and educators should favour positive discipline methods and avoid corporal punishment in order to support children's development.

ALTERNATİVE DİSCİPLİNE METHODS

Alternative discipline methods offer a variety of strategies for parents who want to move beyond traditional approaches such as reward and punishment, considering the complexity of child development. These methods aim to provide a more positive understanding of discipline by developing children's self-control, responsibility, and cooperation skills. For example, the "democratic parenting" approach encourages children to cooperate and establishes caring, cooperative relationships with them,

resulting in fewer discipline problems in the long run (Solter, 2020). "Democratic discipline" teaches children that their behavior affects others and demonstrates a respectful approach in crisis situations (Nelsen, 2021). Effective discipline aims to encourage children to cooperate and develop emotional resilience, thereby strengthening their internal skills (Siegel & Bryson, 2020). In the "unconditional parenting" approach, children are supported to grow up as responsible individuals and focus on long-term goals rather than short-term obedience (Kohn, 2021). Positive discipline offers children choices, uses natural consequences, and develops problem-solving skills, which teaches nonviolent conflict resolution methods (Nelson, Lott, & Glenn, 2007). These alternative methods help children grow up to be responsible, cooperative, and happy individuals, and provide parents with more effective ways to relate to their children.

CONCLUSION

Studies have clearly demonstrated that the use of corporal punishment in child discipline has many negative effects on individual, family and social aspects. Corporal punishment can cause a wide range of negative effects from permanent physical injuries to psychological traumas in children. This method can damage children's self-confidence, self-esteem and general mental health. In addition, it negatively affects children's social and emotional development by causing loss of trust in family relationships and social isolation. One of the most severe consequences is the risk of death if corporal punishment is excessive.

It is seen that the widespread use of corporal punishment in our country spreads these negative effects to a large mass and threatens the healthy development of children. This prevalence causes serious problems at both individual and social levels and these problems need to be prevented.

Positive discipline stands out as an effective alternative to corporal punishment. The success of positive discipline in supporting children's positive behaviours, protecting their psychological health, strengthening relationships within the family and providing social skills necessitates the dissemination of these methods. Positive discipline is an approach that develops children's intrinsic motivation and shapes their behaviour positively. This method respects children's processes of making mistakes, learning and growing and guides them instead of punishing them.

As a result, it is critical to adopt positive discipline methods to reduce the negative effects of corporal punishment and to support children's healthy development. This approach will support social security and integrity by increasing the well-being of both children and families. Steps to be taken in the fields of education, awareness and policy development to reduce the prevalence of corporal punishment and promote positive discipline in our country will contribute to positive changes in the long term.

The following recommendations should be taken into consideration in order to reduce the negative effects of corporal punishment and to adopt healthier alternatives in child discipline:
1. Education and Awareness Raising:
   - Parent Education Programmes: Parent education programmes should be organised to explain the harms of corporal punishment and positive discipline methods. These programmes should provide parents with information on child psychology, effective discipline strategies and communication techniques, and teach them how to reduce corporal punishment.
   - Social Awareness Raising: Through media campaigns and public awareness projects, the harm of corporal punishment should be widely disseminated and the advantages of positive discipline should be emphasised.
2. Promoting Positive Discipline:
   - Positive Discipline Workshops: Workshops and seminars should be organised for parents and teachers to teach positive discipline strategies. In these activities, children should be shown how to set healthy boundaries and encourage positive behaviour.
   - School and Family Co-operation: Co-operation between parents and teachers should be encouraged to implement positive discipline methods in schools. This ensures that children encounter a consistent understanding of discipline both at home and at school.
3. Policy and Legal Regulations:
   - Legal Regulations: Legislation should be enacted to prohibit or limit the use of corporal punishment in child discipline. These regulations should aim to protect children's rights and prevent domestic violence.
   - Supportive Policies: State and local governments should develop supportive policies that promote positive discipline methods. These policies should include elements such as providing resources to parents and educators, offering training programmes and creating social support systems.
4. Providing Support and Resources:
   - Counselling and Support Services: Psychological counselling and support services should be available for parents and children. These services can guide parents on how to approach their children and help children cope with the trauma they have experienced.

- Resources and Tools: Provide practical tools, books and online resources for parents and educators to implement positive discipline techniques. These resources should include practical strategies and tips to support positive behaviour.

5. Research and Development:
  - Supporting Research: Scientific research examining the effects of positive discipline methods should be supported. This research can help determine the best implementation strategies by evaluating the effectiveness of the practices.
  - Innovation and Improvement: Innovative solutions should be continuously developed on positive discipline practices. Parents and educators should be encouraged to experiment.

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