

Socio-Cultural Perspectives of Child Discipline and Child Abuse in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Objectives. This study used a descriptive, qualitative design to explore the local understanding of child discipline and analyze the important link between parental discipline and child abuse.

Methods. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted with parents, children, local leaders, and professionals in 6 rural communities in the Philippines. The respondents were asked which corrective behaviors they would consider acceptable or abusive to children by showing them a list of disciplinary acts.

Results. The results showed an adequate understanding of the purpose and intent of child discipline. Children are generally disciplined to teach them good values, mold and shape their characters and equip them with a moral sense of right and wrong. Child discipline is considered already harmful if: the child sustains physical injuries and psychological pain; the disciplinary action is not commensurate to the offense committed by the child and is used frequently and repetitively, without any valid reason; when sensitive body parts such as the head are involved, and when the disciplinary action is not appropriate to the age, gender, physical and mental status of the child. Among the various types of disciplinary acts, counseling, beating or spanking, and withdrawing or reducing school allowance were considered most acceptable. Hanging, burning, and scalding were the most unacceptable or abusive disciplinary behaviors. Compared to parents, professionals, and local leaders, children were more lenient as they regarded certain inappropriate behaviors by adults as somewhat tolerable.

Conclusion. Despite having an adequate understanding of the purpose and intent of child discipline, there is still a need to educate parents, children, and local leaders about when a disciplinary act becomes harmful to children. Community stakeholders should also be informed about how and where to report the abuse once it is identified.

Keywords: child discipline, child abuse, perceptions, rural, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Individuals need guidance to help them develop into happy, healthy, and productive adults capable of reaching their full potential. To attain this goal, discipline is said to be a necessity. The word “discipline” comes from the Latin word *discere*, which means “to learn.”¹ The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines “discipline” as training that intends to establish desirable habits by controlling a child’s behavior through punishment or rewards.² Other definitions look at discipline as the practice of making people obey rules or standards of behavior and punishing them when they do not.³ These definitions imply that discipline can entail both positive and negative actions. While it teaches the child to understand the socially-accepted standards, morals, and expectations, it also involves physically or emotionally punishing the child as a form of correction and training.

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Ingham posited that meanings and scripts attached to child discipline depend on understanding the social and normative contexts in which they occur.⁴ The type of disciplinary style, therefore, depends on the rules about what are the culturally-acceptable parenting practices. Some adult behaviors may be considered “abusive” in some cultures but may be tolerated in others. Marshall also explains that discipline starts with the adult’s perception of the child’s true needs.⁵ A misunderstanding of those needs can leave the door open to counterproductive responses by the parent. Children and parents may react differently to the same situations, and it can be difficult to delineate when a disciplinary act becomes abusive. To the parent, inflicting some amount of pain may be considered corrective. However, the same action may be deemed already abusive to the child.

Balter identified four key ways of parenting and instilling child discipline.⁶ On one end, the democratic type provides warmth, encouragement of children’s independent thinking, and moderate and firm training. On the other end, the authoritarian type of parenting has too little warmth and respect for the child’s individuality and a high degree of control with much emphasis on making demands from children. In between are parents of the permissive type who usually display a less caring attitude and less control but encourage more independence for their children. In contrast, the neglectful parent has little warmth, lacks concern for the child’s welfare, and absence of involvement in their daily needs and activities. In the Filipino context, Medina posited that Filipino parents make use of two types of disciplining their children: 1) positive techniques, which include praising, granting privileges, and rewarding the child; and 2) negative techniques, which entail scolding, spanking, instilling fear, depriving the child of what he wants, and isolation.⁷

Although there is a growing interest in “positive parenting,” in which praise, reward, and non-punitive acts are favored, physical discipline of children is still widespread.⁸⁻¹² The reliance on physical punishment can be traced to the religious belief that “sparing the rod will spoil a child” (Proverbs 13:24). In the 2000 WorldSAFE four-country study, where mothers were asked how they and their partners disciplined their children, 35 percent reported that they used physical punishments such as slapping, kicking, hitting with a fist and repeatedly beating while 47 percent used verbal and emotional means such as shouting, calling them names, cursing and insulting. About 70 percent used a combination of physical and psychological types of discipline.^{13,14} However, a national survey involving 2,699 mothers recruited randomly from the 16 regions of the country showed that 83.6 percent of Filipino mothers would advise their children when the latter misbehaved, while 87.6 percent would explain to the child why they had done wrong. Aside from counseling the child, more than a third (37.6%) would spank or beat the child with a piece of wood, broom, or any other material, 10.2 percent used pinching, and 2.4 percent made the child kneel

for some time. In contrast, others used scolding, threatening, and more severe physical forms to discipline their children.¹⁵

Successful interventions, therefore, depend on a clear definition and understanding of abusive disciplinary behaviors. Abused children, for example, fail to report their sad predicament because of their poor understanding of what constitutes abusive behavior. Some children may view a somewhat abusive situation as “normal” as they fail to equate severe parental discipline with child abuse. In the 2015 NBS-VAC study, only about 7 percent of the children who were victims of various forms of violence disclosed their experiences to someone, mainly their mothers and friends.¹⁶ Fewer consulted professionals. One of the reasons for non-disclosure and non-consultation was that they did not consider the abusive act a problem. Attitudes and practices of corporal punishment can also become intergenerational.¹⁷ Actual experiences of corporal punishment may imply endorsement of corporal punishment as a future parenting strategy of choice. Studies have shown that those who experienced corporal punishment as a form of physical discipline are more likely to use the same parenting strategy with their children and even in their interpersonal relationships.¹⁸⁻²⁰

What differentiates an acceptable disciplinary behavior from an abusive one? This study involving six rural areas in the Philippines attempted to provide a more contextualized meaning of adult behaviors that can be culturally regarded as unacceptable, harmful, or abusive. Specifically, answers to the following research questions were sought: What is the local understanding of child discipline? Do parents, children, local leaders, and professionals differ in the way they understand the concept of child discipline? In what situations or circumstances would they consider a disciplinary action acceptable or abusive to the child?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive, qualitative study aimed to explore the local understanding of child discipline and child abuse in six selected rural barangays (communities) in the Philippines. Two study sites were in Pangasinan, 2 in Occidental Mindoro, and 2 in Camotes Island in the Visayas. These communities were catchment areas of Plan International at the time of the study.

Study Population

The target populations were parents and children in the six selected barangays. Teachers and other professionals, as well as local leaders, were also invited for the interviews. Parents and children were chosen randomly from a household master list, while teachers, professionals, local leaders, and vulnerable children were selected through reference or snowball sampling. The respondents were classified by age, gender, and social roles.

Instrumentation

Several semi-structured interview guides were developed for this study according to the type of respondents. The local understanding of “child discipline” and its benefits and risks were asked in all forms. Moreover, the most common types of disciplinary acts used by parents and teachers in the community were ascertained. Showing a list of disciplinary actions, the respondents were also queried about which of these behaviors they would consider acceptable or harmful to children. Hence, the distinctions between child discipline and child abuse were noted.

Similar questions were asked from children and adolescents. Local leaders and professionals were additionally asked about the mechanics of dealing with child abuse cases in the community and the type of interventions already in place. These questions were pretested through expert opinion, then finalized.

Data Collection Procedures

Social preparation and community contact preceded data collection by the research assistants and local interviewers. Necessary permits to conduct the study were also sought from local leaders.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to gather the needed information on child discipline. Parents and children were interviewed in their respective abodes with their informed consent. Otherwise, they were asked to come to the barangay hall for the interview at a scheduled time. Similarly, other children were interviewed in school. Professionals and local leaders were interviewed in their respective offices. Except for teachers, all other respondents were interviewed as key informants. FGDs were held for the teachers unless the selected informant expressed a preference for a one-on-one interview. In all cases, anonymity and privacy were assured.

The interviewers introduced themselves as researchers from the university. As part of the introduction, the study's objectives were well explained to the respondents, and they were assured that all their answers would be kept confidential. For the one-on-one KIIs, data collection was interviewer-administered. The participants' notions of child discipline and their disciplinary practices were asked.

The FGDs were conducted in schools or the barangay hall. They were coordinated with the principals of the various schools and the barangay chairman, who were informed of the activity before the scheduled date. During the FGDs, where participants usually know each other, it was emphasized that the researchers were only interested in their opinions about child discipline. But if they want to relate their own disciplinary experiences with their children, they are free to do so. Confidentiality of information was, however, emphasized to the group. The KIIs lasted about an hour, while the FGDs were conducted for about two hours. With permission from the respondents, the interviews were taped and manually recorded.

Aside from the safety of the study participant, the safety of the field staff was also an ethical concern. Interviewers were advised to forgo their fieldwork in remote, unsafe places. They were cautioned and trained to use their discretion and be extra careful when interviewing known vulnerable cases or their parents.

Data Analysis

All information gathered from the taped and manually recorded interviews was transcribed using a data matrix prepared for this study. The data matrix contained all the responses of each type of respondent classified by gender and age group vis-à-vis the interview questions. From the matrix, the data were content analyzed. Core themes and patterns of responses were highlighted. Meaningful quotes were also noted. For items where exact frequencies were needed (e.g., ranking of disciplinary acts according to the degree of acceptability), the data were encoded into a data entry program and were analyzed descriptively.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Distribution

Seven hundred and ninety-three (N=793) parents, children and adolescents, teachers, other professionals, and local leaders participated in this study. Children, adolescents, and youth comprised 37 percent of the study population (Table 1). A little less than a fifth each were parents and teachers. Approximately 10 percent were professionals (e.g., police, psychologists, social workers, doctors, other health professionals, and lawyers), and about 11 percent belonged to the vulnerable groups of LGBTs, disabled, adopted, and physically maltreated children. The rest were local leaders (political leaders, religious leaders, NGOs).

Regarding sex distribution, 46 percent of the respondents were males, and 54 percent were females (Figure 1).

About 46 percent of the respondents were children, adolescents, and youth aged 3-24 years, and 54 percent were adults (Table 2). Gays and lesbians had an average age of 20.5 years, ranging from 16-31 years, while other vulnerable respondents were children and adolescents aged 10-18.

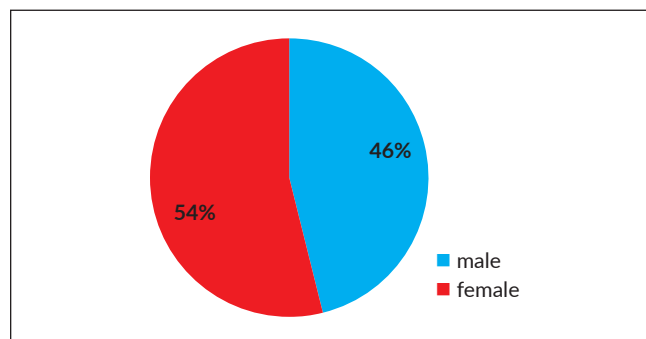


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents, by sex, all areas.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by type, all areas

Type of respondents	Frequency	Percent
Parents	153	19.3
Children	293	37.0
Teachers	135	17.0
Other professionals	84	10.6
Local leaders	42	5.3
Vulnerable groups	86	10.8
Total	793	100.0

Concept of Child Discipline

Similar patterns about notions of child discipline were expressed by the respondents regardless of age, gender and profession, or social role. In general, disciplining children was equated with teaching good values, molding and shaping their characters and personalities, correcting their misbehaviors according to society's standards, and equipping them with a moral sense of right and wrong.

Parents' understanding of child discipline focused on instilling the right values and correcting erroneous behaviors. Child discipline was considered a part of loving and caring for children. Older parents thought of child discipline as an essential tool for maintaining a harmonious relationship within the family ("*a child who listens becomes respectful and obedient to parents and elders*"). In comparison, younger parents stressed the importance of discipline to prevent children from developing into scalawags or trouble-makers. One father mentioned that it is a pride for parents if their children are well-disciplined, implying that the child's behavior somehow reflects some measure of success or failure for the parents.

Teachers looked at discipline as a necessary tool for teaching. Disciplined children were essential to a productive class since "a well-disciplined class can absorb lessons faster and more effectively." One teacher said that one could not teach well if the "children do not have discipline." Discipline was seen as a way of introducing a sense of responsibility. It also equips the children with the capacity to manage their behavior as they grow older. Furthermore, discipline was seen by teachers as crucial for the following reasons: (1) to be an exemplary individual; (2) to correct mistakes and make [the child's] life better; (3) to train the child to follow the rules and be a good citizen.

To local leaders and professionals, discipline meant rearing children well, inculcating in them a sense of right and wrong, and training them at a young age to learn to abide by the rules of society. Emphasis was placed on respect for elders and fear of God as primary values. They stressed that child discipline should be accompanied by love and understanding. Child discipline means, "above all, loving a child, telling him what to do and what not to do in a manner that does not degrade his personhood nor entail physical

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by age group, all areas

Type of respondents	Frequency	Percent
Children and youth	363	45.8
3 -.7 years	75	9.5
8-12 years	107	13.5
13-18 years	98	12.4
19-24 years	83	10.5
Adults	430	54.2
25- 35 years	204	25.6
35 years and above	226	28.5
Total	793	100.0

pain or torture." Child discipline was said to involve communication, the imposition of rules within the household, and the reinforcement of positive values. The professionals and local leaders believed that children should be given a set of regulations or prescribed standards from which their good behavior can be gauged. There should be proper warnings and explanations as to the reasons for imposing such disciplinary acts.

On the other hand, religious leaders believed that disciplining a child is a tool for guiding the child in his social relations and an instrument for spiritual guidance. Children should be taught to fear God and live a holy life. Local leaders and professionals deemed it their responsibility to defend and protect children's rights, foremost of which are the rights to education, food, shelter, health, and a secure and peaceful environment.

Children of various age groups viewed child discipline as a manifestation of their parent's love and concern for them. One respondent commented that he felt happy whenever his parents disciplined him because "I am important to them." For the children-respondents, discipline helps them distinguish between right and wrong, develop righteous attitudes, and is a means to avoid further scolding by parents and teachers. Disciplining a child is essential so that "children learn from their own mistakes, change their attitudes and do what is right." The children-respondents also considered discipline vital for them "to grow healthy, strong, bright and respectful."

Vulnerable groups also had the same line of thinking. They opined that child discipline is a means of teaching children's good manners and values so that they grow up properly and with respect for their elders. They believed that a well-disciplined child would learn how to stand on his own and be independent. There were others from this group who, however, opined that the purpose of child discipline is to impose punishment. For them, child discipline is equated with restrictions from parents and elders. Some young girls did not find discipline necessary because "the body is painful."

There had been some subtle age distinctions in how children looked at child discipline. Many children aged 3 to 7 had more concrete notions of child discipline. These young children understood the purpose of discipline as "to take an afternoon nap," "not repetitive or insistent (*makulit*) or be a cry

baby" (*iyakin*), "not troublesome" (*hindi pala-arway*), and "be a good child." Others already had some notions of discipline that functions as "to help parents" and "to do household chores." Discipline for children aged 8 to 12 focused more on building a good foundation for the future. Responses such as "to have a good future," "so parents will not have problems when children grow older," "to develop good manners," and "to help and respect parents" were not uncommon.

Moreover, the concept of child discipline for those aged 13-18 years indicated awareness of their future (e.g., "to build good character," "have a good future," "for their own good," and "so the child will not go astray") and the effects of their actions on their parents (e.g., "if not, they might abuse their parents," "so parents will not have a difficult time"). Perceptions of many late adolescents were more specific about the values to be shaped through discipline. These included: "to develop into a straight, responsible, and kind person," "to understand what is right and wrong," "so the child's behavior will be righteous," and "so that the child will have the right kind of life." Not much difference was noted between male and female respondents.

Perceptions of Risks Related to Discipline

Disciplining a child can also become risky or disadvantageous. For the respondents, child discipline becomes harmful when done excessively or too frequently. It also becomes risky when corporal punishment is involved. They further opined that when discipline goes out of bounds, the child may become rebellious and hardheaded and may start telling lies to cover up his wrongdoings.

With negative discipline, children may develop a fear of people and a sense of inferiority and thus become withdrawn and anti-social. Moreover, respondents opined that these children usually do not perform well in school and often become violent as they pick up fights with classmates or peers. When disciplining the child becomes too restrictive, the child may develop hatred towards the disciplining authority. Any form of discipline where the child does not understand or appreciate the reason(s) why he is being disciplined and when he is not given any alternative behavior to emulate may also become detrimental.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Disciplinary Acts

Among the various disciplinary acts, counseling was reported by all types of respondents as the most acceptable method of disciplining children (Table 3). Children should be advised about good manners and proper conduct, taught how to love and respect oneself and other people, taught how to fear God, and be aware of better alternatives to misbehaving. There were some respondents who, however, commented that counseling may not always be effective because if the child is "hard-headed," they will not listen. Moreover, children may sometimes misinterpret the advice as scolding (*sermon*), especially if the parent becomes highly repetitive (*makulit*). Other children may also find the advice "corny," irritating, or outdated and tend to ignore the parent's good intentions.

The second most acceptable behavior was "beating/spanking." It is noteworthy that parents, local leaders, and the vulnerable groups ranked "beating/spanking" in the top two positions. During the in-depth interviews, the respondents

Table 3. Disciplinary acts considered acceptable (in ranks) by type of respondent, all areas

Disciplinary acts	Overall	Parents	Children	Teachers	Other Professionals	Local leaders	Vulnerable groups
Counseling	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Beating/Spanking	2	2	3	3	3	2	2
Reducing/withdrawing school allowance	3	3	2	2	2	3	3
Pinching	4	4	4	5	5	8	5
Taking away rights /privileges	5	8	7	6	3	5	5
Threatening	6	4	8	5	4	6	6
Touching	7	5	6	4	6	4	9
Twitching ears	8	6	5	11	8	7	4
Shaking	9	9	9	8	9	10	6
Kneeling for sometime	10	7	11	10	10	9	9
Imprisonment	10	10	11	9	7	10	8
No communication	11	11	10	7	10	10	9
Not tending to needs	12	12	12	17	16	14	7
Saying hurting words	13	13	12	16	15	11	12
Slapping	13	11	13	17	14	13	10
Hitting nape/head	16	14	14	19	16	12	10
Tying up	17	15	15	20	18	14	12
Not giving food	17	18	16	18	17	12	11
Hitting with fists	18	16	17	19	18	13	13
Kicking	18	17	16	21	17	14	14
Hanging	19	20	18	21	18	14	14
Burning/scalding	19	19	17	21	18	12	15

in these categories mentioned that children sometimes need a beating so they would remember that what they did was wrong. There was also a possibility that vulnerable groups were projecting their own experiences with their parents and others, as mentioned by some of them during the interviews.

Aside from beating/spanking, behaviors such as “reducing or withdrawing school allowance, pinching, twitching of ears, taking away privileges, and touching were also considered acceptable disciplinary behaviors. In this sense, “touching” was interpreted as providing comforting touches such as a tap on the shoulder (*tapik*) or hugs (*yakap*). However, “touching” was given a rank of 9 by the vulnerable groups, indicating less acceptability for “touching” among this group of respondents. Also, teachers ranked “twitching of ears” lower than the rankings of other respondents. In the interviews, some teachers mentioned that twitching the ears could affect the child’s mental capabilities.

The least acceptable disciplinary acts were hanging, burning/scalding, hitting with a fist, kicking, tying up, not giving food, and hitting the head or nape (descending order). Hanging, burning/scalding, tying up, and not providing food were considered “inhuman.” Kicking was highly degrading because “the feet are used” (*kasi ginagamit ang paa*). Hitting the head or nape was risky because it “lessens one’s intellectual capacity” (*nakakabobo, magiging retarded*) or may even lead to death or coma.

When classified according to age groups (Table 4), the respondents considered counseling as the most acceptable method, followed by taking away privileges (3-7-year-olds),

reducing/withdrawing school allowance (8-12-year-olds), and beating/spanking (adolescent and adult groups). The least accepted among young children were slapping, hitting with a fist, burning/scalding, and not giving food. For 8-12-year-old children, they claimed that they could not tolerate being hanged, tied up, burned/scalded, kicked, and hit in the head or nape. The following disciplinary acts were reported to be least acceptable by adolescents, youth, and early and late adults: hanging, burning/scalding, hitting with a fist, kicking, tying, not giving food, and hitting the head or nape.

No evident differences were reported between male and female respondents (Table 5). The most acceptable disciplinary acts for both groups were counseling, no communication, imprisonment, beating/spanking, and reducing/withdrawing school allowance. The least acceptable were hanging, burning/scalding, hitting with fists, kicking, not giving food, and tying up. Female respondents also considered saying hurting words and hitting the nape/head as unacceptable.

Factors Related to the Acceptability of a Disciplinary Act

Age

Many respondents commented that the acceptability of a particular disciplinary act depends on many factors. Foremost among these is the age of the child. Certain adult behaviors should only be used with older children and adolescents. Table 6 provides the average age upon which a particular disciplinary action can be tolerated.

Table 4. Disciplinary acts considered acceptable (in ranks), by age group, all areas

Disciplinary acts	Children and adolescents				Adults	
	3-7 years	8-12 years	13-18 years	19-24 years	Less than 35 years	35 years and above
Counseling	1	1	1	1	1	1
Beating/Spanking	5	3	2	2	2	2
Reducing/withdrawing allowance	3	2	3	3	3	3
Taking away rights/privileges	2	4	6	9	5	5
No communication	4	6	11	13	12	10
Touching	5	7	8	6	7	5
Pinching	6	5	4	4	4	6
Twitching ears	8	8	5	5	8	8
Threatening	7	9	7	7	6	4
Shaking	9	8	6	8	9	10
Imprisonment	9	10	10	11	10	9
Saying hurtful words	7	10	14	14	14	11
Kneeling for sometime	10	12	9	12	9	7
Not tending to needs	10	11	15	10	13	12
Slapping	13	13	12	14	11	12
Hitting with fists	13	17	19	17	16	15
Kicking	11	15	17	19	17	16
Hanging	-	17	20	18	18	16
Hitting nape/head	-	14	13	14	14	13
Tying up	-	15	16	15	15	16
Burning/scalding	13	16	21	-	17	17
Not giving food	12	14	18	16	17	14

Table 5. Disciplinary acts considered acceptable (in ranks) by sex, in all areas

Disciplinary Acts	Male	Female
Counseling	1	1
No communication	2	3
Imprisonment	3	2
Beating/Spanking	4	4
Reducing/withdrawing school allowance	5	5
Pinching	6	6
Taking away rights/privileges	7	7
Threatening	8	8
Touching	8	9
Twitching ears	8	10
Shaking	9	11
Kneeling for some time	10	12
Saying hurtful words	11	15
Not tending to needs	11	14
Slapping	12	13
Hitting nape/head	12	16
Tying up	14	18
Not giving food	15	17
Hitting with fists	15	18
Kicking	15	18
Burning/scalding	16	19
Hanging	17	19

Table 6. Average age at which the various disciplinary acts can become tolerable, all areas

Disciplinary Acts	Mean	SD
Touching	0	3.8
Shaking	2.7	4.9
Counseling	3.2	3.9
Pinching	4.0	3.7
Twitching ears	4.3	4.0
Threatening	4.7	4.6
Beating/Spanking	4.7	4.1
Saying hurtful words	6.0	6.2
Kneeling for sometime	6.4	4.7
Taking away rights/privileges	6.6	6.3
Reducing/withdrawing allowance	8.6	5.1
Slapping	9.2	6.5
Hitting with fists	9.6	6.5
Not tending to needs	12.6	6.7
Not giving food	13.5	5.5
Tying up	14.3	5.3
No communication	14.5	6.1
Imprisonment	15.8	6.6
Kicking	18.1	6.1
Hitting nape/head	18.7	5.4
Hanging	-	-
Burning/scalding	-	-

Statistics

Touching was deemed to apply to children immediately after birth but must have constrained use as the child reaches adolescence. Let it be reiterated that, in general, the respondents equated touching with comforting physical gestures such as *tapik* (tapping), *himas*, or *yakap* (massage or hugging). However, it acquires a sexual meaning when applied to adolescents.

On average, shaking was considered acceptable when the child was 2.7 years of age. It should be noted that by professional standards, shaking the child is not recommended and is generally harmful to children three years of age and below. Counseling was suggested at age 3.2 when the child can already understand instructions or advice. Neglect of needs, tying up, not giving food, imprisonment, and no communication was perceived to be only applicable starting in early adolescence. Kicking and hitting the head/nape can be done to at least 18-year-old adolescents. All other disciplinary acts are appropriate during early and late childhood (4-10 years of age). Burning/scalding and hanging were considered intolerable at all times and in all age groups.

Type of Offense

Aside from age, the type of disciplinary act used by adults also depends on the offense committed by children. The respondents were asked about the “ideal” disciplinary method they think is appropriate for a given offense.

“Ideal” interventions seemed to combine verbal and physical disciplinary behaviors. It appeared, however, that

professionals and local leaders were more prone to suggest counseling, and parents and some teachers advise or scold the child. However, children of various age groups quickly recommend physical and psychological means of discipline, even severe ones like kicking, scolding with harsh words "so the child learns," intense spanking or beating and, scolding to the point of embarrassing the child. Between mothers and fathers, fathers tended to use physical means, although it was not uncommon for mothers to suggest methods such as spanking and twitching of the ears.

Among the various offenses, it was obvious that the respondents were more tolerant of such behaviors or conditions as having a boyfriend/girlfriend, breaking a favorite home décor, or even if the child does not attend class and gets failing grades. Ambivalent attitudes were displayed toward being gay or lesbian. Fathers had more negative reactions to gay or lesbian children than mothers. Mothers had higher tendencies to accept the gender preference of their children. However, between having a gay or lesbian child, the interviewers noted that many parents would prefer a gay son to a lesbian daughter. Comments like "gays help in household expenses," "gays earn a lot of money," "lesbians do not work and just stand by," and "lesbians are usually sources of headaches" were not unusual.

Stealing, coming home drunk, and using prohibited drugs were considered the most serious offenses by all groups. Many respondents suggested imprisonment or sending the child to jail because of the offense.

Child Discipline versus Child Abuse

The respondents were all aware that disciplinary methods can become abusive or extremely harmful to the child. In general, they considered child discipline to be harsh based on the following criteria:

- presence of physical injuries, bruises, marks, and physical or psychological pain;
- frequency of using the disciplinary act;
- reason and purpose of imposing the said disciplinary act;
- effects of the disciplinary action on the child's behavior, character, and attitudes;
- timing and place when child discipline is imposed;
- type of disciplinary act used; and
- part of the body affected or hit.

Thus, child discipline can be differentiated from child abuse using the following guidelines:

1. The purpose of discipline is positive (to teach/train), while the intention behind abuse is negative (to vent out anger). Discipline, when inflicted at the peak of anger, turns into abuse;
2. Discipline is for the good of the child, while abuse is self-serving. Discipline is done for the development of the child, while abuse is done for the satisfaction of the perpetrator;
3. The choice of the disciplinary action is appropriate and particular to the offense, while abusive acts are indiscriminate (i.e., may be the same reaction to different situations), inappropriate and habitual.
4. Child discipline takes into consideration the physical status, mental state, age, and gender of the child, while child abuse is done without considering these aspects.
5. Discipline preserves the dignity and person of the child by considering the time and place when it happens, whereas abuse serves to degrade or humiliate the child.

No significant differences were noted in respondents' perceptions regardless of age and gender. For example, mothers think that discipline becomes abusive when: inappropriate to the situation or unreasonably extreme for the child's deed; too harsh, too much; child's rights were violated; child got hurt; the child becomes very fearful; child rebels; the parent has lost control of self; and if the disciplinary act persists even if the child can no longer take it.

Fathers distinguished discipline from abuse based on the following points: when it is too much, frequent, repetitive, inappropriate, and indiscriminate; when the child was not fed, not sent to school; when the child was harshly spanked, punched, kicked, pinched; when a parent is under the influence of alcohol; when the child is bodily and mentally harmed (e.g., intensely beaten, hanged, threatened, raped, beaten until child collapses).

Children were very clear that child discipline is already harmful if they get physically hurt, when it leaves scars, or when parents are too strict. The same is true when this is

given every day, especially for an extended period; when the child is degraded or neglected; when done in public; when it is inappropriate to the offense committed; if the act results in wounds/bruises; and if the child develops emotional/mental trauma. Teachers, professionals, and local leaders had the same ideas. To them, any disciplinary action that entails physical contact and is done excessively defeats the purpose of discipline.

Community Response to Child Abuse

The respondents, especially the teachers, professionals, and local leaders, seemed well-informed about children's rights. The least informed among the groups were the children themselves although older, children expectedly had better knowledge than younger ones.

Also, many study participants were aware of the various campaigns advocated by the local government and non-government organizations. As mentioned, teachers are now wary about instilling harsh discipline among their students. However, these groups of professionals and some parents also agreed that the values of today's youth are different from those of previous generations. A factor attributed to this change was the softening of the approach in terms of discipline.

Despite the awareness campaigns, formal reporting of child abuse cases were few in all the study sites. One primary reason was that family members did most of the cases, and the affected persons usually opted to keep the issue a private family affair. Also, the community seemed apathetic about the plight of their neighbors and co-residents; during the interviews, many respondents were quite hesitant to talk about the way their neighbors disciplined their children. They seemed to adopt a "live and let live" policy. Even if they hear about stories of abuse, they do not seem to have the sense of duty to report these cases to the proper authorities. The respondents who told the researchers about the instances of abuse persistently reminded them never to tell anyone that they were the ones who divulged the information.

Aside from the classic case of threat from perpetrators, the other reason why abuse cases went unreported was because of shame. Children were afraid to report because the whole municipality would be in the loop about the story, thus infusing shame not just to the child but to the entire family. There was also a failure to distinguish good discipline from abusive discipline among children and parents. To many children, severe disciplinary acts were "normal" and expected. To some parents, the disciplinary action, no matter how severe or irrational, was still considered a part of caring for the child ("to make sure that the child is on the right path").

Local officials and other community leaders recognized that poverty is a factor in the non-reporting of abuse cases. Aside from the resulting illiteracy or lack of knowledge, many victims did not have the means to go to authorities and sustain the legal issue. Poverty also results in amicable settlements where the victims drop the legal case in exchange for some money. As identified by social workers, a further source of

discouragement is the judicial system in the community. If and when a case is forwarded to the authorities (barangay council, municipal council, and police), it takes quite some time before the necessary documents (i.e., warrant of arrest) is issued. The significant amount of time lost gives the perpetrator a chance to escape the community and hide. This gives the community members the impression that justice and preventing abuse are impossible. Hence, the community felt frustrated with how child abuse cases are handled.

There were efforts to develop or strengthen the child protection programs implemented by NGOs, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and Local Councils for the Protection of Children (LCPC). Core groups were organized, and facilities were put into place. Some awareness programs have already been implemented where community assemblies, posters, and parents' classes were conducted.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that respondents from the six rural communities in the Philippines understand the purpose and intent of child discipline vis-a-vis child abuse. This was not surprising given the various information drives people are regularly exposed to, mainly through the media. The respondents knew that the purpose of discipline is to teach or train a child to become a good person, while the intention behind abuse is usually to hurt or humiliate the child to the satisfaction of the perpetrator.

The respondents' views were similar to those of Gallo, who offered four possible criteria to distinguish acceptable disciplinary behavior from abusive disciplinary acts.²¹ The first criterion relates to whether the disciplinary act causes humiliation to the receiver. According to Gallo, abusive behavior debases, degrades, or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of the child as a human being. Proper discipline is conducted in private to preserve the dignity of the child. Second, the disciplinary act inflicted should be related to the offense. The disciplinary action is deemed just and fair if it is proportional to the infraction done by the child. Third, is the disciplinary act impulsive and anger-driven? For Gallo, discipline should be well-thought-out and planned and is not the result of impulse. Fourth, the disciplinary action is abusive if it results in physical injury. Once the child sustains physical injuries due to any disciplinary action, the act ceases to be disciplinary and enters the realm of child abuse.

However, despite knowing what constitutes abusive disciplinary behaviors, many parents and even teachers are still prone to use severe physical and psychological means of disciplining children. The children-respondents had more negative answers to the same question, which may indicate how their parents and other adults have disciplined them. Therefore, there are, indeed, issues that need to be addressed concerning child discipline, specifically concerning corporal punishment.

For one, community residents must be continuously informed about children's rights, the proper ways to discipline children, and the governing laws regarding child abuse through information-dissemination and empowerment drive in the school and the community. Still, at its initial stage in many study sites, the child protection system through the LCPC needs more amplification where more seminars, training, and capacity and team-building workshops are conducted. The functions of LCPCs, in collaboration with the DSWD and non-government organizations (e.g., Plan International, UNICEF, Child Protection Network), should be strengthened to provide accurate information and health, social and legal services to those in need. The community should also be prepared to handle reports of child abuse once awareness-raising campaigns result in increased reporting. They should be informed on how, where, and when they should report child abuse cases. Furthermore, laws on child abuse must be fully implemented. Local officials must all be well-acquainted with the nuances of the law and their role in handling child abuse cases.

Economic problems, transportation difficulties, and accessibility of legal and psychosocial services are pervading constraints in the pursuit of justice and the rehabilitation and reintegration of the child survivor. Making these services available in the community will mean identifying professionals who can be trained to provide these services (e.g., paralegal training, indigenous psychotherapy or counseling skills).

CONCLUSION

Despite having an adequate understanding of child discipline, there is still a need to educate parents, children, and local leaders about disciplinary behaviors that are considered harmful or abusive to children, as well as the mechanics of awareness-raising, reporting, handling, and rehabilitating cases of abuse.

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Both authors contributed in the conceptualization of work, acquisition and analysis of data, drafting and revising, and approved the final version submitted.

Author Disclosure

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