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Investigating the Relationship between Parental Punishment and Academic Achievement: A Case Study of Secondary Level Students in Sargodha, Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study explored the link of parental punishment with academic achievement of secondary school students. The sample size of 400 students (200 male and 200 female) was conveniently selected from both the private and the public secondary schools of tehsil Sargodha. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. The collected data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Major findings included that the majority of the students were physically punished. Whereas, some students were psychologically and emotionally punished by their parents. The results showed that parental punishment causes low academic achievement among students. The current study recommended that parents should not punish their children as it ultimately lowers their academic performance outcomes. This practice of parental punishment may be discouraged by guiding the parents in parent-teacher meetings.

Keywords: academic achievement, emotional punishment, parental punishment, physical punishment, psychological punishment, secondary level students

Introduction

Parental punishment is a technique used by the parents since ages in order to discipline their children. The current study tries to investigate if it is right to use parental punishment to discipline the child or is it more than an excuse to not give them a logic to identify their mistakes. Whether, it is helpful for parents to train the child properly or to beat them on their mistakes, instead. Moreover, if the punishment contributes positively to help the parents to teach discipline or not. Children have same human rights of protection as adults. Due to all these interrogations, the parental

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punishment is taken as a very serious issue to be resolved. Further, many researchers reported the negative consequences of parental punishment. (Barnow et al., [2001](#)), However, conversely Gershoff ([2002](#)) stated that punishment helps in immediate compliance. It may be due to fear of being beaten again. On the other hand, parental punishment doesn't show much strength in the long-term compliance. The classification of corporal punishment is different in different cultures. Somewhere, it is known as smacking, spanking, canning, cuffing, chaining, kneeling, thumping, paddling, licking, and others. Mostly, parental punishment may be categorized into three broader terms such as psychological punishment, emotional punishment, and physical punishment (Pinheiro, [2006](#)).

Psychological Punishment

Punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury. The main purpose of doing this is to correct or control the child's bad behaviour. The aim is to prevent the recurrent bad behaviour of a child. It has negative psychological effects on them and sometimes punishment in public results in humiliation (Gershoff, [2002](#)). Physical force implants the fear and pressure in child's mind and also conveys a clear message of using physical force by an adult. It is not only a physical aggression but a big source of psychological aggression as well (O'Connor & Scott, [2007](#)). Parental punishment threatens physical as well as mental well-being of a child. Many mental problems occur among children due to physical punishment, that is, feelings of unhappiness, increased level of aggression, depression, low morale, and hopelessness. Moreover, there are some types of punishment that destroy the children mentally by inducing fear, disgust, or loss of dignity in them rather than giving external pain, that is, public humiliation and others. (Hart et al., [2005](#)).

Emotional Punishment

Any adult, guardian or caregiver who punishes a child emotionally and keeps that child in isolation, shuts the child in a room for long time, prevents them to meet friends and family, and controls their food intake (Erickson & Egeland, [2002](#)). Terrorizing a child is an extreme form of giving the psychological damage to children from their parents. It can be in the form of teasing, giving verbal threats, to be sarcastic towards a child, scaring a child, giving extreme reactions. Also, it is threatening the children to reveal

their personal information by embarrassing them in front of their relatives or friends (Straus, [1998](#)). Emotional punishment is actually rejecting behaviour towards child and degrading them by ignoring and condemning their needs. Mostly, parents are emotionally unavailable for the child which is considered as an emotional punishment.

Ignoring a child could be in the form of no response to child's questions, failure to recognize child's interests, their school activities, their peer group, don't care for their health, and don't protect them from any harm (Brassard, [2001](#)). Moreover, the children who face rejecting behaviour by their parents start to think that they are useless for their parents. They always have this doubt that either their parents do it consciously or unconsciously. Some other ways of rejecting could be asking a child to leave, calling him with offensive names like you are laziest in the whole family. Also, blaming the child for sibling's mistakes and making harsh criticism on them. Exploiting is the form of emotional punishment in which children are forced to perform work/task more than their strength. It requires a child to be more responsible for their parents and siblings. In this case, parents start expecting their children to perform the household duties without regarding their age and ability (Moylan et al., [2010](#)). Thus, there are no physical scars of emotional punishment. Hence, it is difficult to identify or prove it and, in the end, a child feels unloved, worthless, and unwanted (Rizvi & Najam, [2014](#)).

Physical Punishment

A type of punishment which is most commonly used by the parents towards their children is called as a physical punishment. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, [2010](#)) reported that they have done survey in 33 countries, half of the children responded that they were physically punished by their parents. In some studies, researchers indicated that physical punishment is the main hurdle between parent-child relationships (Gershoff, [2010](#); Mulvaney & Mebert, [2010](#)). The children who are physically punished by their parents whom they are dependent may feel more humiliation and embarrassment. Pain of punishment may results in weeping and disgraceful efforts not to do like that again. But, as a result children feel more disgraced on their own (Lenta, [2017](#)). Spanking is another name of physical punishment. It has been applied since the beginning of writing history of punishment (Abbasi, [2017](#)). In USA, improvement in the students' performance in states which

are forbidding corporal punishment is better than the states where corporal punishment is used (Hickmon, [2008](#)).

Punishment and Academic Achievement

Many researches show that even a mild and infrequent parental punishment has shown no significant good academic achievement. It ultimately results in the psychological harm of children and violates their rights. Since, it is an incomplete discussion at exactly what level of severity can cause psychological harm (Christensen & Cleary, [1990](#); Gershoff, [2002](#)). In a study conducted by Turner and Muller ([2004](#)), they revealed that the children who have been punished by their parents, portray themselves as below average students. However, their grades show their above average performance. It means that parental punishment damages the child's sense of mastery on academic concepts. In this way, many learning theories describe that punishment doesn't support to fulfill the need of long term behavioral change in children. So, physical punishment should be avoided because it has no evidence regarding that it results in better academic achievement. Even, the children started telling lies to their parent in order to prevent themselves from punishment after making mistakes. However, an international study was conducted on college and university level students related to their childhood experiences and current attitudes towards the corporal punishments. Furthermore, the study conducted by Curran et al. ([2001](#)) found that countries reporting the highest percentage of inflict of corporal punishment in childhood also obtained the highest scores.

In our society, especially in the middle and the lower middle class, parents punish their children physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Such kind of punishments surely affect the children in many aspects. Especially it affects in terms of academic achievement in schools. So, the current study was opted to know that what kind of parental punishment influences the students most at secondary level and what is the gender wise and sector wise ratio of parental punishment.

Objectives

The objectives of the current study were:

- 1) Explore the nature of parental punishment, that is, emotional, psychological, and physical punishment.
- 2) Investigate its relationship with academic achievement of secondary schools students.

Hence, the current study would help the school principals to understand the adverse effects of parental punishment. It also guides the teachers that how to deal with the students and also guides the parents through parent-teachers' meetings. The only purpose of this meeting is the avoidance of parental punishment for child's better academic achievement.

Research Methodology

The current study was exploratory and the survey techniques were used to find out the nature of parental punishment given to the students and their academic achievement in schools. The current study was delimited to the students of secondary schools (grade 10th) of tehsil Sargodha due to the financial constraint. Therefore, all the students (boys and girls) studying in the 10th class of both public and private secondary schools of tehsil Sargodha constituted the population. Twenty male and twenty female students were conveniently selected from the twenty randomly selected schools making a sample of 400 students.

Two questionnaires were developed; one for the students to inquire about their academic status in the form of board result of class 9th class and one question that either they receive punishment from their parents or not. The second was self-developed questionnaire made for parents consisted of 24 items in the factors of parental punishment. The physical punishment, psychological punishment, and emotional punishment were those factors used to collect data. Cronbach Alpha Reliability of the tool was 0.843.

Data were collected through self-approach in two phases; first the questionnaire was administered to 400 students and those students were identified who responded for receiving punishment from their parents, they were 243 in number. While the other students responded that they were not receiving punishment from their parents. Later on, the students who were receiving punishments from their parents were requested to get the questionnaire filled from their parents. Thus, the filled questionnaires from the parents were 231. The response rate was 95%. The data were analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.

Results and Findings

Results and findings were drawn on the basis of data analysis.

Table 1
Students' Level of Punishment by Parents

Level of punishment	Frequency	Percent
Mild punishment	9	3.9%
Moderate punishment	117	50.6%
Severe punishment	84	36.4%
Highly severe punishment	21	9.1%
Total	231	100.0

Table 1, shows that majority of the students 87% face moderate (50.6%) or severe (36.4%) punishment from parents. A handsome number of students face highly severe punishment which is alarming in number. Hence, overall trend is about moderate and severe level parental punishment.

Table 2
Emotional Punishment

S#	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1.	You ask your child to get out	1 (.4%)	7 (3%)	26 (11.3%)	91 (39.5%)	106 (46%)	1.76	1.03
2.	Do not give much attention	1 (.4%)	...	4 (1.7%)	89 (38.5%)	137 (59.3%)	1.44	.57
3.	Do not interact consistently		2 (.9%)	14 (6%)	92 (40%)	123 (53.2%)	1.55	.65
4.	Make harsh criticism on child's mistake	5 (2.2%)	50 (21.6%)	38 (16.5%)	54 (23.4%)	84 (36.4%)	2.30	1.22
5.	Don't express love	74 (32%)	104 (46%)	42 (18.2%)	5 (2.2%)	6 (2.6%)	4.02	.90
6.	Care for health	229 (99%)	...	...	1 (.4%)	1 (.4%)	4.97	.32
7.	You don't allow your child for social activities.	55 (23.8%)	70 (30.3%)	51 (22%)	33 (14.3%)	22 (9.5%)	3.45	1.26
8.	Take away privileges	3 (1.3%)	1	27 (11.7%)	116 (50.2%)	84 (36.4%)	1.80	.76
	Total	368 19.9%	234 12.6%	202 10.9%	481 26%	563 34.5%	2.66	.83

Table 2, shows that with respect to the emotional punishment, majority of the parents claimed that they (85% with $M = 1.76$, $SD = 1.03$) never or rarely ask the child to get out, 98.8% (with $M = 1.44$ & $SD = .57$) give attention to children, 93% (with $M = 1.55$ & $SD = .65$) interact consistently with children, 86.6% (with $M = 1.80$ & $SD = .83$) never or rarely take away privileges. 76% parents claimed (with $M = 4.02$ & $SD = .9$) that they always or often don't express their love to children. Many of the parents, almost 60% said that they never or rarely whereas 23.8% parents (with $M = 2.30$ & $SD = .9$) often or always, make harsh criticism on child's mistake. On the other hand 99% parents claimed that they care for their children health, 54% parents said, they don't allow their child for social activities. Whereas, 22% stated for some time but 23.8% parents claimed that they allow children for social activities.

Overall parents showed trend of moderate level emotional punishment to children such as 60.5% parents claimed that they never or rarely punished their children emotionally. Whereas, 11% parents punish some time, while 32% described that they often or always punished their children emotionally.

Table 3
Psychological Punishment

S#	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1.	Shout at child	4 (1.7%)		2 (9%)	89 (38.5%)	136 (59%)	1.47	.7
2.	Close in room	...	...	...	2 (.9%)	229 (99%)	1.01	.093
3.	Want the child to do everything according to your will	17 (7.4%)	47 (20.3%)	68 (29.4%)	64 (27.7%)	35 (15.2%)	2.77	1.15
4.	Express child's mistakes in front of others	6 (2.6%)	15 (6.5%)	80 (34.6%)	95 (41%)	35 (15.2%)	2.40	.91
5.	Call your child with offensive names	76 (33%)	5 (2.2%)	36 (15.6%)	45 (19.5%)	69 (30%)	2.9	1.65
6.	Abuse	26 (11.3%)	18 (7.8%)	12 (5.2%)	12 (5.2%)	163 (70.6%)	1.84	1.44
	Total	129 9.31%	85 6.13%	198 14.28%	307 22.15%	667 48.12%	2.06	0.99

Table 3, shows that according to 97.4% parents (with $M = 1.47$ & $SD = .7$), they never or rarely shout at their child, almost all (99.9%) parents (with $M = 1.01$ & $SD = .09$), never locked their child in the room and 75.8% parents (with $M = 1.84$ & $SD = .99$) never or rarely abused their children.

According to 43% parents (with $M = 2.77$ & $SD = 1.15$), they never or rarely wanted their child to do everything as per their will, 29.4% parents some time wanted this but 27.7% parents always wanted this; 556.2% parents (with $M = 2.4$ & $SD = .91$) never or rarely mentioned their child mistake in front of others, 34.6% sometimes did this but 9% parents always or often did this; 49.5% parents (with $M = 2.9$ & $SD = 1.65$) never or rarely called their child with the offensive names, 15.6% parents sometimes did this but 35.2% parents always or often did this. Overall parents showed trend of moderate level psychological punishment to children such as majority (70.27%) of the parents (with $M = 2.06$ & $SD = .99$) never or rarely gave psychological punishments to their children. Whereas, 14.28% parents sometimes do this while 15.44% parents always or often do this.

Table 4
Physical Punishment

S#	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1.	Slap	1 (.4%)	2 (.9%)	15 (6.5%)	82 (35.5%)	131 (56.7%)	1.53	.7
2.	Smack	...	...	4 (1.7%)	3 (1.3%)	224 (97%)	1.05	.28
3.	Spank with an object	...	...	...	4 (1.7%)	227 (98.3%)	1.02	.131
4.	Kick	...	1 (.4%)	...	1 (.4%)	229 (99.1%)	1.02	.21
5.	Twist ears and arms	...	2 (.9%)	3 (1.3%)	1 (.4%)	225 (97.4%)	1.06	.36
6.	Pull your child's hairs	178 (77%)	14 (6.1%)	13 (5.6%)	16 (7%)	10 (4.3%)	4.45	1.14
7.	Push	186 (80.5%)	10 (4.3%)	15 (6.5%)	6 (2.6%)	14 (6%)	4.51	1.12
8.	Pinch	185 (80%)	19 (8.2%)	7 (3%)	12 (5.2%)	8 (3.5%)	4.56	1.01
9.	Hit on hands with stick	173 (75%)	6 (2.6%)	16 (7%)	10 (4.3%)	26 (11.3%)	4.26	1.39
10.	Grab or shake	76 (33%)	114 (49.4%)	21 (9%)	11 (4.8%)	9 (4%)	4.03	.98
	Total	798 34.5%	166 7.18%	94 4.06%	142 6.14%	1103 47.7%	2.74	.73

Table 4, shows that according to the majority (92.2%) parents (with $M = 1.53$ & $SD = .7$) they never or rarely slap their children, 98.3% parents (with $M = 1.05$ & $SD = .28$) never or rarely smacked their children, almost all (99.5%) parents (with $M = 1.02$ & $SD = .21$) never or rarely kicked their children, 98% parents (with $M = 1.06$ & $SD = .36$) never or rarely twist ears

and arms of their children. While, 83% parents (with $M = 4.45$ & $SD = 1.12$) responded that they always or often push their children. Similarly, 84.75% parents said that they always or often pinch their children, 77.6% parents were of the view that they hit on the hands of their children with stick, and 82.4% parents said that they always or often grab or shake their children. Overall parents showed trend of moderate level physical punishment to children such as many (53.8%) of the parents (with $M = 2.74$ & $SD = .73$) never or rarely gave physical punishments to their children. While, 42.6% parents always or often do this and only 4.06% parents sometimes do this.

Table 5
Severity of Parental Punishment

S#	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1.	You punish your child as severe as it left bruises.	195 (84.4%)	9 (3.9%)	7 (3%)	12 (5.2%)	8 (3.5%)	4.61	1.01
2.	You punish as it caused pain but no bruises.	166 (72%)	19 (8.2%)	22 (9.5%)	10 (4.3%)	14 (6%)	4.35	1.19
3.	You give your child mild punishment.	181 (78.4%)	12 (5.2%)	21 (9%)	9 (4%)	8 (3.5%)	4.51	1.04
4.	You give severe punishment to make your child obedient.	...	1 (.4%)	...	1 (.4%)	229 (99.1%)	1.02	.237
5.	You give your child both forms of punishment (mild and harsh).	6 (2.6%)	4 (1.7%)	43 (18.6%)	95 (41%)	83 (36%)	1.94	.92
	Total	548 47.44%	45 3.8%	93 8.05%	127 11%	342 29.61%	3.28	.88

Table 5, shows that According to 88.3% parents (with $M = 4.61$ & $SD = 1.01$) they always or often punish their child as severe as it left bruises, 80.2% parents (with $M = 4.35$ & $SD = 1.19$) expressed that they always or often punish their child as it cause pain but no bruises; 83.6% parents (with $M = 4.51$ & $SD = 1.04$) said that they give mild punishment to their child. While, almost all the (99.4%) parents (with $M = 1.02$ & $SD = .23$) said they never or rarely gave severe punishment to their child to make him obedient and similarly 77% parents (with $M = 1.94$ & $SD = .92$) said that they never or rarely gave both mild and harsh forms of punishment. Overall parents views were for severe level of severity of punishment to children such as many (47.44%) of the parents (with $M = 3.28$ & $SD = .88$) always or often gave severe punishment to their children. While, 40.6% parents never or rarely do this and only 8.05% parents sometimes do this.

Table 6
Necessity of Parental Punishment

S#	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1.	In anger, you think before punishing	214 (92.6%)	11 (4.8%)	4 (1.7%)	1 (.4%)	1 (.4%)	4.9	.46
2.	Punishment is the only thing that child understand when they disobey	3 (1.3%)	5 (2.2%)	11 (4.8%)	90 (39%)	122 (52.8%)	1.60	.79
3.	Punishment is necessary to rear the child properly	1 (.4%)	...	1 (.4%)	6 (2.6%)	223 (96.5%)	1.05	.33
4.	Consider punishment as part of your culture and tradition	3 (1.3%)	5 (2.2%)	81 (35%)	124 (53.7%)	18 (7.8%)	2.35	.71
5.	After punishment children learn what is right or wrong	47 (20.3%)	51 (22%)	52 (22.5%)	44 (19%)	37 (16%)	3.12	1.36
	Total	268 23.2%	72 6.2%	149 12.9%	265 22.94%	401 34.71%	2.60	.73

Table 6, shows that according to the majority (97.2%) of parents (with $M = 4.9\%$ & $SD = .46$) claimed that they think before punishing their child in mood of anger. But 91.8% parents never or rarely think that punishment is the only thing to make their child obedient; 99.1% parents never or rarely think that punishment is necessary to rear their child properly. 42.5% parents (with $M = 3.12$ & $SD = 1.36$) said that always or often after punishment children learn what is right or wrong. Whereas 22.5% parents said sometimes children learn while 35% parents were of the view that children never or rarely learn right or wrong after punishment. 61% parents (with $M = 2.35$ & $SD = .71$) never or rarely considered punishment as a part of the culture and tradition. Overall parents showed trend of moderate necessity of punishment to children such as many (57.6%) of the parents (with $M = 2.6$ & $SD = .73$) never or rarely think punishment to children as necessity. While 29.4% parents always or often think punishment to children as necessity. Whereas, only 12.9% parents sometimes think punishment to children as necessity.

Table 7
Levels of Academic Achievement of Students punished by Parents

S.#	Level/Categories	Frequency	Percent
1	Satisfactory	3	1.29%
2	Fair	24	10.3%

S.#	Level/Categories	Frequency	Percent
3	Good	137	59.3%
4	very Good	63	27.2%
5	Excellent	2	0.86%
6	Exceptional	2	0.86%
	Total	231	100%

Table 7, shows that 87.5% students who received parental punishment acquired good or very good level of academic achievement. Whereas, 11.32% acquired the fair or satisfactory level of academic achievement while only 1.72% students acquired an excellent or exceptional level of academic achievement.

Table 8

Correlation between Parental Punishment Reported by Parents and Academic Achievement

S.#	N	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
128	231	-0.228	0.000

Table 8, shows that there was a significant but negative and weak relationship between the parental punishment reported by the parents and *academic achievement* of students as indicated by r - value = -0.228 and p-value = 0.000 < α = 0.05. It means that as the parental punishment increases the academic achievement decreases.

Discussion

Majority of the students receive moderate and severe level of parental punishment whereas a handsome number of parents often or always punished their children emotionally, psychologically, and physically. This result confirms the findings of Lansford et al. (2010) that a large proportion of parents use corporal punishment to try to manage their children's behavior.

Though majority of the parents have severe views about the severity of punishment to children. The result is in line with Twum-Danso (2013) who found that parents consider physical punishment as the most appropriate means of instilling these values in them.

Majority of the parents have moderate views about the necessity of punishment for children. The result is in line with the findings of Ipsos MORI (2007) that parents think it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child.

Majority of the parents do not consider punishment as a part of the culture and tradition. This result is in line with the results of Lenta (2017) that parental punishment is a part of culture and was considered as normal act.

Majority of the students receiving parental punishment acquired good or very good level of academic achievement but not excellent or exceptional level achievement. This result confirms the findings of Turner and Muller (2004), that children who have been punished by their parents show above average performance but could not achieve excellent grades.

As the parental punishment increases, the academic achievement decreases. Because there was a significant but negative and weak relationship between parental punishments reported by parents and academic achievement of students. This result confirms the result of Oteri and Oteri (2018) that the negative relationship as decrease in corporal punishment increases academic performance.

Conclusion

1. Majority of the students receive moderate and severe level of parental punishment. Majority of the parents gave moderate level emotional punishment, psychological punishment, and physical punishment to their children. But a handsome number of parents often or always punished their children emotionally, psychologically, and physically.
2. Majority of the parents have severe views about the severity of punishment to children. But a handsome number of parents were never or rarely in favor of severity of punishment towards their children.
3. Majority of the parents have moderate views about the necessity of punishment for children. But a handsome number of parents' views are in favor of necessity of the punishment.
4. Majority of the parents do not consider punishment as a part of the culture and tradition. But a handsome number of parents somewhat consider punishment as a part of their culture and tradition.

5. Majority of the students receiving parental punishment acquired good or very good level of academic achievement. However, least students get excellent or exceptional level of academic achievement.
6. Majority of the students receiving parental punishment acquired good or very good level of academic achievement. However, least students get excellent or exceptional level of academic achievement.

Recommendations

On the basis of findings, it is recommended that teachers should persuade the parents in parent's teacher meetings that they should not punish their children even mild as punishment results in lower academic achievement.

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