



RESOURCES AIMED AT THE PREVENTION
OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT
(RAPCAN)

SUBMISSION¹ TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ON VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

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About RAPCAN

Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN) is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation that has been in existence since 1989. It is a registered Section 21 Company that is devoted to protecting and promoting children's rights and responsibilities. RAPCAN activities include: participation in law and policy reform processes to advocate for the realisation of children's rights; providing support services to child witnesses in Sexual Offence Courts; and developing and implementing training programmes to address issues related to the violation of children's rights. The RAPCAN training unit is staffed by a small team of trained educators who collectively have extensive experience in the education of children at schools and who focus on designing and delivering training programmes to educators and learners at schools across the Western Cape. These programmes include positive discipline methods, a bullying prevention programme, a programme on the prevention of sexual harassment, a programme to develop resilience in young boys and general child abuse awareness and prevention programmes.

1. Introduction

Schools are typically places where we believe children to be safe. In spite of this, research and communication with children indicates that many children perceive the school environment to be unsafe². Reports indicate that children feel unsafe travelling to and from school as well as on school premises³. This includes waiting for transport outside of the school gates, travelling on public transport, walking through fields and bushes in rural areas as well as urban roads.

Children report experiences of various forms of violence, ranging from assault, robbery and muggings, rape and indecent assault as well as verbal harassment⁴. Children's safety is threatened by educators, school managers, other learners, other youth who are not at the school and other adults from within or outside the community.

Research into the areas in school in which learners feel most unsafe indicates that the toilets are perceived as the least safe areas, open grounds and playing fields are also perceived as extremely unsafe, the principals office and class rooms also featured⁵.

² In a recent National Youth Victimization Study 11.5% of the respondents reported that they were fearful in their school or place of employment (75.5% of respondents were still attending school) Leoschut L, Burton P (2006) *How Rich the Rewards: Results of the 2005 National Youth Victimization Study* Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention Monograph No. 1 (p. 37)

³ 16.8% of respondents in the National Youth Victimization Study indicated feeling unsafe travelling to and from school. (p. 68) (2006) *Put my hand on my heart: Audience research with parents* Soul Buddyz message development workshop Soul City: Institute for Health and Development Communication

⁴ (2001) *Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools* Human Rights Watch; National Youth Victimization Survey (2006) (p.68)

⁵ National Youth Victimization Survey (2006) (p. 69)

Exposure to violence and the direct experience of victimisation have a profound impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of children. A broad range of factors influence children's responses to traumatic experiences. These include: the nature of the violent incident, the child's personality and development, and features in the child's environment including parents and family members. In spite of this a traumatic experience will have a significant impact on the majority of children⁶.

Repeated exposure to violence is said to lead to the normalisation of violence for children.⁷ This exacerbates the psychological effects of violence and is associated with an increase in the likelihood that children will participate in violence and crime. Poor school performance also emerges as a key feature of the impact of violence on children⁸.

2. Corporal Punishment, Discipline and Violence in Schools

The belief that the removal of corporal punishment from schools has led to a decline in the levels of discipline at schools is widely held by parents and teachers⁹. However there are a number of questions that must be asked in relation to this view.

2.1. Have schools stopped using corporal punishment as a result of the legal ban?

Recent research in South African schools has indicated that 58% of teachers in the study believe that corporal punishment should be reinstated in schools and that 28% admit to still using corporal punishment¹⁰. We note that due to the fact that this study relied on self-reporting, these numbers may well be higher.

In the 2005 National Youth Victimisation Survey, 51.4% of the respondents indicated that they had been caned or spanked at school for misbehaviour¹¹.

Children indicate that although they are sometimes hit for actual misbehaviour there are times when the punishment is given based on the wrong assumptions of the educator (or

⁶ Berman, SL, Silverman, WK & Kurtines, WM (2000) Children's and Adolescent's exposure to community violence, post traumatic stress reactions and treatment implications *The Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies* 1 www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/issues/2000-1/berman.htm

Murphy, J (1998) Art Therapy with Sexually Avused Children and Young People. *Inscape*, 3

⁷ Stavrou V (1993) Psychological effects of criminal and political violence on children. *The Child Care Worker*, 11, 7

⁸ Stavrou V (1993), Butchart A, Phinney A, Check P & Villaveces A, *Preventing violence; A guide to implementing the recommendations of the world report on violence and health* Department of Injuries and Violence prevention, WHO (2004)

⁹ Responses to public radio call in shows during 2006, Soul Buddyz Audience Research with Parents (2006) and teachers communication with RAPCAN staff (2006), interviews with NGOs providing positive discipline training in schools August 2006.

¹⁰ Rapport 28 January 2006 reporting on research conducted by the University of the Free State, School of Education

¹¹ National Youth Victimisation Survey (2006) (p. 72)

parent) or when the child has not yet been given a fair opportunity to achieve the results desired by the educator or parent¹².

“if you don’t get your books on your desk fast enough, he comes and hits you with a chair but there’s not enough time” (14 year old boy Western Cape)¹³.

Based on this evidence, as well as the anecdotal evidence of others that interact with schools on a regular basis, it is clear that corporal punishment is still part of way in which education is delivered. Given that so few of these instances are brought to light in the public domain, it is also clear that teachers and schools are failing to report the use corporal punishment and are becoming complicit in the use of violence against children.

2.2. Have levels of discipline actually become worse since the ban on corporal punishment?

It is difficult to answer this question given that there have been no research efforts to monitor this issue before and after the ban on corporal punishment. It is important to note, however, that research has shown that there are several elements that impact on discipline (and violence) in schools. Some of these are discussed below.

NGOs who develop positive discipline models in schools indicate that where positive discipline systems are implemented in schools (to replace corporal or humiliating punishment) there is a clear improvement in levels of cooperation and discipline of learners and educators in schools. The success of these models seems to be dependent on the willingness and commitment of the school management and educators to adopting a new approach, and they leadership that they offer to such a process. It should be noted that such models are not dependent on access to high levels of additional resources. In fact, such programmes are intended to be inexpensive and based on the needs of the school¹⁴.

Since many schools and educators continue to use corporal punishment as a method of discipline, the argument that removing corporal punishment has led to greater levels of violence and ill-discipline in schools is considered unfounded by organisations who work in schools on the issue of discipline¹⁵.

¹² RAPCAN junior youth participation group 26 August 2006

¹³ Personal communication with author 9 September 2006

¹⁴ Preliminary findings from interviews with NGOs on the impact of positive discipline systems in schools

¹⁵ Experience of Management Systems and Training Programmes UCT, Quaker Peace Centre, New World Foundation and Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in relation to the development of positive discipline programmes in schools in the Western and Eastern Cape during

2.3. What factors affect levels of violence and discipline in schools?

Discipline can be defined as “An educational process by which adults assist children and adolescents to develop the self-control and self-direction necessary to assume responsibilities, make daily living decisions, and learn to live in conformity with accepted levels of social behaviour”¹⁶ it goes beyond punitive measures that are aimed at ensuring compliance and blind adherence to set rules. Positive discipline is based on the idea that children learn more through co-operation and reward than through conflict and punishment¹⁷.

Positive discipline recognises the importance of being consistent and providing routine. It aims to teach children self-control and leads to self-respect, self-discipline and self-confidence. Other benefits are that it results in children having the ability to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences, and the ability to cooperate with other people. One of the results of the use of positive discipline is that there are lower risks of children resorting to violence to resolve conflict¹⁸.

Recognising and rewarding positive behaviour provides reinforcement and encourages children to repeat positive behaviour. Systems of discipline that establish clear and reasonable expectations of children, where discipline is fair and consistent achieve far better results than the punishment of children for real or perceived wrongdoing. Systems that engage the participation of children in setting rules and limits increase positive outcomes in relation to discipline.

Corporal punishment prevents children from developing self discipline¹⁹ because the punishment does not seek to address the consequences of their behaviour. It is also confusing to children and does not provide them with reasons why they should behave differently in future²⁰. Thus many children continue to behave in the same way, but develop strategies to avoid getting caught. The failure of corporal punishment as a method of developing discipline in children is also seen in the experience of teachers and parents who note that children who are punished in this way for wrongdoing are often repeatedly punished for similar and other misbehaviour. If corporal punishment worked children would not need to be punished repeatedly.

¹⁶ www.dphilpotlaw.com/html/glossary.html

¹⁷ Alexandrecu G, Bhavania YG, Derib A, Habasch R, Horno P, Nilsson M, Noueri R, Pierre-Plateau D, Sequeira L, Sonesson U & Stuckenbruck D; 2005: *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children Making it Happen. Global submission with recommendations, prevalence and attitudes and good practice examples to the UN Study on Violence Against Children*. International Save the Children Alliance

¹⁸ M. Cronan, “Discipline is Not a Dirty Word” 2005

¹⁹ Grolnick, W.S., Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1997) *Internalisation Within the Family: the Self-determination perspective and Hoffman, M.L. (1983) Effective and Cognitive Processes in Moral Internalisation*

²⁰ Gershoff, E. (2002). *Corporal Punishment by Parents and Associated Child Behaviors and Experiences: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review*. Columbia University p 541

Children who are subjected to corporal and humiliating punishment are less likely to respect other people's rights and more likely to display other behavioural problems such as lying, disobedience, cheating and bullying.²¹ Thus the use of corporal punishment in schools where levels of discipline are poor is likely to make discipline an even bigger problem.

It is important to note that children's behaviour at school will also be influenced by their experiences at home (in the family) and in the community. Simply removing corporal punishment will not address the discipline needs of a school. It is important that it is replaced by a system of discipline that emphasises a positive approach, that takes the needs of the learners, the school and the community into account and that is developed through the participation of learners, educators and parents.

There are other factors that will impact on discipline in schools besides the methods of discipline that are employed. It is undeniable that children learn by example, and while there are many excellent role models in the education system it is also true that there are educators who set an extremely poor example. It was noted by service providers that the behaviour of the learners was at times a reflection on the behaviour of the educators or of their parents. For example, absenteeism was high in classes where educators would frequently be absent or late²². Other practitioners have observed that educators often punish learners for behaviour that they themselves engage in²³.

"It depends on how we the parents behave, what life are we living. So our children are going to copy the way we behave" (Parent in Rural Limpopo Province)²⁴

It is noted that adults often use violent or humiliating forms of punishment on children as an expression of their own stress, anger or frustration²⁵ and not necessarily as a direct consequence of the nature of the child's behaviour. Larger numbers of learners in classes is associated with poor discipline in the class. A high educator/learner ratio is likely to result in educators feeling overwhelmed and poorer levels of discipline in the class. It is suggested that the lack of familiarity of some educators with the new curriculum may add further to the stress that educators may experience in the classroom²⁶. Management systems at schools also impact significantly on the effectiveness of teachers. Where school managers and governing bodies are not cognisant of the many challenges faced by both educators and

²¹ Paintal S *Banning Corporal Punishment of Children: A Position Paper* Association of Childhood Education International.

²² Interview with Management Systems and Training Programmes on their experience of discipline in 8 schools in the Eastern Cape in which they worked to build positive discipline systems in the schools.

²³ Southern African Regional Workshop on Corporal Punishment January 2006 Cape Town. Hosted by Save the Children

²⁴ Focus group discussion in Soul Buddyz Audience Research with Parents (2006)

²⁵ Dawes A, De Sass Kropiwnicki Z, Kafaar Z & Richter L (2005), *Corporal Punishment of Children, A South African National Survey* and Thompson Gershoff, E. (2002). *Corporal Punishment by Parents and Associated Child Behaviours and Experiences: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review*

²⁶ Preliminary report on impact of positive discipline in schools. Seminar on Positive Discipline 15 June 2006 Hosted by Community Law Center and RAPCAN Cape Town

children, they are unlikely to adopt approaches that support educators in carrying out their duties.

Educators who are attempting to implement positive discipline methods report that it is difficult to build self discipline in learners where this is not supported by parents who rely heavily on corporal punishment at home.

Children's exposure to violence and disrespect in their home and community also influences their levels of discipline and violence at school. Children who come from violent or abusive personal contexts are more likely to display behavioural problems at school.

In spite of racial integration in many schools, racism often goes unchallenged, resulting in a culture of acceptance of more insidious forms of discrimination. While learners are exposed to the concept of racism and discrimination, the values of non-discrimination may not be practiced by educators nor is discrimination challenged when displayed by the learners²⁷.

This is illustrated by the following example: An educator at a Cape Town school could not pronounce the Xhosa names of many of the Xhosa learners in her class in spite of it being more than half way through the school term²⁸. Her response when questioned about this was that "*they don't pronounce my name properly so why should I learn theirs*". This lack of commitment to valuing each child and ensuring that values of non-discrimination are a lived experience as opposed to a learnt concept for children will continue to impact on the emotional well-being of children. This will in turn fuel racial tension between learners and influence the levels of violence and discipline in schools.

Entrenched systems of gender inequality are likewise unchallenged in learners²⁹. This contributes to experiences of sexual harassment and sexual victimisation of learners. Sexual harassment of girl learners is often misunderstood or accepted by other learners and educators³⁰. This behaviour extends from verbal harassment through to rape. We are concerned that given the nature of underreporting of sexual offences in general and especially of those offences perpetrated by adults against children, it is critical for the National Department of Education to strengthen reporting and accountability mechanisms regarding dealing with sexual offences at schools. It is also critical that effective support systems be put in place to respond to learners that have experienced sexual violence.

²⁷ RAPAN staff discussion on the issue of Violence In Schools 01 September 2006 based on experience of three staff members who were previously educators employed by the Department of Education and who currently work with schools and educators to enhance protection of children's rights and promote responsibility of learners and educators at schools.

²⁸ Direct communication with RAPAN staff member, reported at the RAPAN staff discussion on the issue of Violence In Schools 01 September 2006

²⁹ RAPAN junior youth participation group 8 July and 29 July

³⁰ RAPAN trainer commenting on Sexual Harassment Training undertaken in schools during 2006

Sports and cultural programmes in schools provide an alternative source of success and self esteem for learners, particularly for those whose strengths do not lie in traditional academic subjects. These activities also provide a constructive space for children to release stress and lower rates of anxiety. Furthermore, some activities provide an opportunity for children to be taught to cooperate and work constructively in groups. The lack of access to these activities is likely to increase the frustration experienced by children whose strengths may not lie in academic success but rather in physical accomplishment or in creative expression (such as art, music, dance or drama). The emphasis on academic success within the education system to the exclusion of these other pathways to achievement may also contribute to higher levels of frustration, stress and anxiety amongst learners. Decreased self esteem may also be a likely outcome under these conditions.

Recommendations

1. The absence of a national policy framework relating to crime prevention and safety in schools continues to be a stumbling block to efforts to reduce violence in schools. While there have been several attempts by the National Department of Education to do this, no comprehensive policy has been successfully implemented. This situation is complicated by the fact that education is a 'concurrent' function of both national and provincial levels of government, and service delivery obligations are concentrated at a provincial level. The result is that there is no framework to guide the actions of the provinces and schools and therefore little guidance as to what kinds of strategies may be appropriate and what investments are the most strategic to make.

We recommend that the National Department of Education take a stronger leadership role in this matter, and develop a national policy on crime prevention and safety in schools in consultation with provincial Departments of Education and civil society.

We further recommend that such a policy should have the intention of guiding school-level activities as well as provincial investment in crime prevention and safety. Among other issues, this policy should:

- Articulate clear principles for the promotion of crime prevention and safety in and relating to schools and school children,
- Promote an evidence-based approach to intervention programmes in schools, and especially provide guidance on strategies that have been found to work,

- Establish clear connections between school-based safety interventions and other related policies e.g. the Victim Empowerment Programme
2. Building and maintaining constructive relationships with civil society are a critical part of responding to this problem. There is evidence of a great deal of knowledge, experience and commitment from civil society, yet organisations experience vastly different responses from provincial government departments. We recommend that provincial Education Departments become proactive in developing relationships with civil society organisations in order to create the conditions for collective efforts towards crime prevention and school safety.
 3. Government is ultimately responsible for what happens to children in schools. For this reason, provincial Education Departments need to also take a stronger leadership and management role in ensuring that all those who provide services in schools are appropriately accountable for their activities. High standards of accountability should be established for both government and civil society actors in schools.
 4. Because violence at school is often an extension of the violence and abuse experienced by children at home and in the community, initiatives to address violence at school must extend beyond the school grounds. The provincial Departments of Education have a responsibility to initiate and participate in projects that enhance the lives of learners beyond the school gates. This must be achieved through integrated strategies involving collaboration with other key government departments at all three levels of government, as well as with civil society organisations.
 5. Particular attention must be paid to developing projects that improve safety of learners travelling to and from school.
 6. It is important to ensure standards of professionalism, particularly in schools with high levels of violence, accountability systems for educators and other staff must be properly implemented. Implementation of policies is undermined because the process of informing and building commitment amongst educators to these is poor. While educators may be aware of a policy, it is likely that if they have not properly informed about it, they may not implement it and lack the will to ensure that colleagues implement the policies appropriately.
 7. The school must be viewed as a central place in the community at which services can be provided for learners and their families and other community members and groups.

The attitude and management style of the school leadership towards parents and community members is critical in providing opportunities for communities to participate in improving the school environment and experience of the learners.

8. Schools must take the initiative to encourage the commitment and participation of parents in their child's education. Parents must be engaged in initiatives to ensure that schools are a safe environment.
9. The ban on corporal punishment in schools must be supported by a strong programme to ensure that teachers are provided with information and support with regard to developing systems and methods of discipline. These programmes must target and encourage the participation of school management, educators, learners and parents.
10. Creating opportunities for the development of parenting skills in the families of the learners is critical not only to the child's home life but also to the functioning of the child in school. This can be achieved through collaboration with the Department of Social Services and NGOs who provide these services.
11. A long term view on violence prevention is critical, in part schools can play a role in this by developing curriculum for learners on parenting skills. It is necessary to ensure more sports and cultural opportunities for learners within the curriculum as well as in the form of after school programmes this is especially necessary in areas where these are not available or are inaccessible to the majority of families.
12. The placement of community development workers in schools must be considered in order to assist in interfacing between learners, the school and the families and community with regard to the needs of individual and groups of learners. Thus the school can play a key role as a site for identifying children and families who are at risk and in need of prevention or early intervention measures.
13. Given the range of experiences and consequent emotional and psychological needs of learners that contribute to social and academic problems, it is necessary for there to be more learner support staff who are trained to provide counselling to learners in order to mitigate the effects of exposure to stress, abuse and violence.