

## **Conceptualizing Islamic Scholars Perspective on Corporal Punishment of Children in Pakistan**

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Corporal punishment is the most debated issues around the globe. In Pakistan it has the support of cultural, social and religious doctrine. This paper aims to understand the real meaning of Islamic teachings with respect to child socialization and character building as corporal punishment is one of the methods used for this purpose. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon ten religious scholars were selected purposively for the study. Data was collected through in-depth interviews using asn interview guide. Discourse analysis method was used for the data analysis process. In order to ensure the anonymity and confidently of the participants data was coded. The study reported that corporal punishment is the outcome of deviation from the real philosophy of Islamic teachings as Islam focuses on the virtues of mercy, kindness, love and affection while dealing with the children whilst at the same time Islam also supports corporal punishment but under certain guidelines and restrictions. The study recommended that providing proper training to teachers on the alternative method of behaviour modification, overcoming the teachers own issues and frustration, proper monitoring and accountability mechanism, proper legislation and following the real meaning of Islamic teachings in dealing with the children and for their socialization and character-building process will be helpful for overcoming the of corporal punishment of children.

**Keywords:** children, corporal punishment, schools, discipline, Islam.

Pakistan is confronted with numerous factors including the educational crises where 7.5 million of children aged 5-16 years are not going to school while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa it is approximately 2.5 million (Munir & Hussain, 2019). Numerous leads to this situation including; poverty, lack of active parents-teachers association, lack of parental interest, unemployment, misinterpretation of the religious teachings and the practice of

corporal punishment in schools (Ailaan, 2015; Munir & Hussain, 2019). The aim of every society is to make their citizens as productive and functional as per the law of the country. Child socialization process is a key factor in this process. On the other hand, for effective child socialization various technique are used in which the practice of corporal punishment remains a matter of debate all over the world due to its pros and cons (Andrew & Stewart, 2002). Proper child socialization is very important as they are considered as the future of the nation as well as for sustainable development the role of qualified masses and quality education cannot be underestimated (Naz *et al.*, 2011). The practice of corporal punishment has been banned now by various countries as a method for child socialization (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2015) however in some countries its practice is still considered as legitimate and legal (UNICEF, 2015). Children must be protected from all types of violence including corporal punishment however; they have been punished on routine basis in homes and schools around the world (Holden & Ashraf, 2016).

Save the Children (2010) reported that teachers perception can play a vital role in the practice of corporal punishment as it is not the student behaviour that leads to its practice but it's the teacher's perception about its practice as they consider it the only mechanism for correcting the child behaviour. The problem of non-conformity with school norms and poor academic performance is also leads to its practice (Tiwari, 2013). Some of the previous studies reported that children are considered as immature whom are unable to make proper decision about different things while on the other hand adults are in the position to make proper decisions about the children for which they sometime use corporal punishment (UNICEF, 2001). While some consider it as the outcome of the poor educational status of the teachers whom are unable to convey the teaching technique properly (Durrant, 2005). UNICEF (2001) reported that lack of accountability of teachers, overcrowdings in schools, infrastructure issues, untrained teachers and poor quality of educational tools increase the corporal punishment at school's level. On macro level cultural acceptability and religious support also leads to its practice (Salazar *et al.*, 2014; Menard, 2013).

Stewart-Tufescu and Durrant (2014) reported that despite of the negative impacts of corporal punishment on child socialization around the world one billion children aged 2-14 are corporally punished while the supporting range for its practice is 3-82% around the globe. Straus *et al.*, (1997) reported that the aim of corporal punishment is to control the anti-social behaviour of the child but in reality, it increases the occurrence of undesirable behaviours. Its practice also causes physical abuse as there is a

## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

greater risk of causing injuries to the child due to the severe practice of corporal punishment (Gershoff *et al.*, 2015). It has been also reported that instead of decreasing the child aggression corporal punishment increase aggression to a large extent (see Gershoff, 2002). Save the Children (2005) reported that corporal punishment hampers the cognitive development of the child aged 2-4 and 5-9 years which on the other side of the coin leads to school drop outs and poor academics in later stage. Holden and Ashraf (2016) reported that its practice develops ‘culture of violence’ as the children start considering it as genuine for resolving the interpersonal problems.

Lwo and Yuan (2011) reported that corporal punishment received the support from educational, cultural, legal and religious doctrine from thousand of years while its practice in school is for maintaining discipline and child socialization philosophies. On the other side of the coin some studies concluded that its practice is beneficial for maintaining short term compliance, school discipline and obedience (Larzelere & Kuhn, 2005) and achieving the academic goals (Marcus, 2014).

### **Islam and Child’s Corporal Punishment**

Islam is a religion of humanity which focuses on affection, love and kindness not only on children and women but on all humankind. The Islamic concept of ‘Mercy’ provides protection to human beings and provide guidelines for the every day life. Islam also advocates that children must be dealt with mercy and affection and no harsh treatment is permissible as it contradicts with the virtue of mercy (Alanazi, 2008; Al-Saud, 2000). The Holy Prophet (PBUH) once said “Is there any one of us who does not show mercy to our children and respect our elderly people” (Hasan, 1993; Alanazi, 2008). On another occasion the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said “He who does not show mercy (towards his children) no mercy will be shown to him” (Khan, 1997; Alanazi, 2008).

Its also a fact that Islam focuses on the virtues of affection, kindness and mercy but on the other hand it also provides guidelines for corporal punishment to be used for child discipline, controlling the misbehavior and child socialization. The purpose of this is to controlling the child from not falling into bad habits (Al-Mutrik, 1999). The practice of child corporal punishment is not mentioned in the Holy Quran but it has been mentioned in some *Hadith*<sup>1</sup> (Holden & Ashraf, 2016) as on one occasion the Holy Prophet

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<sup>1</sup> A Hadith is one of various reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The term comes from Arabic meaning a

(PBUH) said “Teach your children to perform prayers at the age of seven and beat them if they do not do so by the age of ten” (Al-Nasser & Darwish, 1991: 201). However; this Hadith also provided a gap of three years for the child behaviour correction and modification. In context to this study it is only focusing on scholars perception on corporal punishment and not the Islamic perspective so the data will be based on the scholars perception.

On the other hand Islam also provided certain guidelines for its practice which are; 1) it must be genuine, 2) its may not hurt the child physically and psychologically, 3) it may not developed hatred, 4) it may not cause school drop outs or runaway, 5) it can only be practiced with the permission of parents or guardian, 6) it can only be practiced with hands and 7) it cannot be practiced on the child head, face and genitals (see Al-Saud, 2000; Alanazi, 2008; Al-Qarni, 2005).

### **Objectives and Significance of the Study**

Pakistan is an Islamic country where not only the routine life, but the law of the country is also guided by the Islamic teachings. The aims of this research study are to highlight the gap between theory and practice of Islamic teaching through the discourse of the religious scholars and to provide research-based suggestions for fruitful intervention related to child rights, protection and welfare. School plays a key role in shaping the child personality and make them productive citizen of nation. School corporal punishment hinders the learning and cognitive development of the child while in return leads to poor academics and school drop outs. In order to eliminate corporal punishment from schools the role of religious scholars cannot be underestimated. This paper will examine the practice of corporal punishment in schools in the light of Islamic teachings which will help to understand the religious philosophies about its practice.

### **Method**

The study was qualitative in nature as this framework is becoming very important in social sciences including community development, education and social work (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The study was based on cross-sectional research design (see Vaus, 2001) and the population was based on religious scholars. Purpose sampling technique for the data collection process (see Creswell, 2003) as the study was qualitative in nature so purposive – non probability sampling procedure was used for sample

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"report", "account" or "narrative". Hadith are second only to the Quran in developing Islamic jurisprudence, and regarded as important tools for understanding the Quran and commentaries written on it.

## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

selection in order to have a more in-depth understanding about the problem. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) reported that the problem of adequate sample size in qualitative studies is always a matter of debate while Burmeister and Aitken (2012) stated that it depends on the nature of the study, research objectives and the researcher choice. Therefore, in order to have the accurate answers for the study a sample of ten religious scholars were selected to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

In-depth interviews were carried out with the participants for the data collection process as it is the most important method of data collection in qualitative studies with the advantages that it provides an opportunity to the researcher and respondent for face to face interaction and rich data can be attained quickly and easily (Legard *et al.*, 2003). The data will be analyzed through discourse analysis adopting Gee (1999) model of six comprising elements which are; 1) semiotic building, 2) world building, 3) activity building, 4) Socioculturally-situated identity and relationship building, 5) political building and 6) connection building. Ethical consideration was adopted in the data collection and analysis stages. In order to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents the data was coded while prior informed consents have been obtained for the respondents before the data collection.

### Results

Before going into the detail discussion first we have to look at the demographic information of the religious scholars. The following table having a summary of the religious scholar's demographic information.

Age	Qualification		%
	Wafaq-ul-Madaris	Religious School (Local)	
26-40	02	00	20%
41-55	04	01	50%
56-60	03	00	30%
Total	90%	10%	100%

Out of the ten religious scholars two were aged 26-40, five 41-55 and the remaining three were aged 56-70 years. Out of the ten religious scholars nine were qualified from *Wafaq-ul-Madaris*<sup>2</sup> and one from a Local Religious Teaching School.

<sup>2</sup> Wafaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia, Pakistan, its board was founded in 1959. It is the largest federation of Islamic Seminaries around the world. More than 10,000 Seminaries and about 8,000 Iqra Schools across the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are affiliated with the federation. It

With respect of support and non-support for the practice of corporal punishment a religious scholar (RS-01) stated;

[Well personally I *support* its practice for maintaining the *discipline* and *behaviour modification* of the child as in Islam there is also the concept of *reward* and *punishment*]

Salazar *et al.*, (2014) and Menard, (2013) also reported that corporal punishment is used for behaviour modification and discipline in the schools. While on the other hand another religious scholar (RS-06) stated;

[Honestly, I do not support it as I believe in *advice* and *rewards* for behaviour correction. And to be very honest our people do not understand the real meaning of the Hadith and Ayat<sup>3</sup> and *misinterpret* it as per their knowledge and experience and indeed corporal punishment is the *outcome* of these *misinterpretation*]

In continuation to this a religious scholar (RS-01) consider corporal punishment is the outcome of deviating from the Islamic teachings as he stated;

[Actually, corporal punishment is the outcome of *deviation* from Islamic teachings as Islam focuses on the virtues of *kindness*, *affection* and *mercy* while dealing with the children. Besides this Islam also focuses on controlling the personal *anger* which is the main cause of corporal punishment in schools]

While some of the religious scholars consider corporal punishment beneficial for maintaining discipline and achieving the academic goals as a religious scholar (RS-02) stated;

[To be very honest corporal punishment is sometimes *helpful* for *classroom administration*, *school discipline* and achieving the *academic goals* as our schools are *overcrowded*, teachers are *work loaded* and no *alternative methods* are available for child behaviour modification and correction]

Religious scholars were also found aware of its negative impacts on children as a religious scholar (RS-02) stated;

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controls all the seminaries which are run by Ahle Sunnat Wal Jama'at(Deoband) School of thought. The head office of Wafaq ul Madaris is situated in Multan (Punjab) Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Ayat means "evidence" "sign" or "Miracle". In the context of Islam's principal scripture, the Quran, ayat is used to mean "verse", i.e. each statement or paragraph marked by a number.

## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

[Well as per my understanding its practice develops *depression, anxiety, fear* and *hatred* towards the teacher, school or any adult from whom the child receives the punishment]

In continuation to this another religious scholar (RS-05) stated;

[Well I believe that in long run it will create the problems of *frustration, anger, physical abuse, violence* and *criminal tendencies* in the child life]

As Pakistan is an Islamic country where the law and customs are guided by the Islamic teachings. Islam focuses on the virtues of love, affection, kindness and mercy while dealing with the children while at the same time it also supported corporal punishment for child behaviour modification in this context some participants consider it as a deviation from Islamic teachings as a religious scholar (RS-01) stated;

[The *Hadith* which supports corporal punishment is related to *prayers* and the *violation* of which is a violation of *discipline* and *Islamic teachings* but one the other hand if we critically evaluate this *Hadith* it stated that beat the child but after *10 years* and it also provided a gap of *three years* for child *behaviour modification*. To be very honest our Holy Prophet (PBUH) never punished a child in his whole life and always showed *affection, love, mercy* and *kindness* towards children. On the other side of the coin Islam also focuses on controlling one *anger* and indeed corporal punishment is the outcome of *personal anger* of the adults]

The same has also been reported by Khan, 1997:1397 and Alanazi, 2008 where a detailed analysis the concept of religious teaching on child socialization process has been mentioned in detail so this study also represented the same way in Pakistani context. On the guidelines for practicing corporal punishment a religious scholar (RS-03) stated;

[Well as our Holy Prophet (PBUH) once stated that every *caretaker* will be asked regarding the people whom are under his/her *control*. But if an adult using corporal punishment for child *behaviour correction* these guidelines will be kept in mind i.e. 1) it must be used as a *last resort* if other methods fail, 2) the child must be *10 years* old, 3) it must be *appropriate* to the wrong doings, 4) it may not *harm* the child *mentally* and *physically*, 5) it must be practiced in *isolation*, 6) the adult may not be in *anger* and 7) *sensitive parts* of the body must be avoided]

In continuation to this a religious scholar (RS-07) with respect to child socialization stated;

[I would like to quote *Hazrat Ali*<sup>4</sup> as once he stated that *love* your child up to *6 years*, while in the age of *6-9 years* teach the child what to do and what not to do, *9-14 years* are of *warning* if a child do something wrong *verbally warn* the child and after *14 years* treat the child as a *friend*]

On the legislative measure related to corporal punishment a religious scholar (RS-07) stated;

[Well in my view it will be a really hard task for the government to do proper *legislation* related to child protection and corporal punishment as we have certain *religious* and *socio-cultural* factors which will *oppose* it]

The religious scholars were found aware of the corporal punishment and its adverse impacts on the child personality and Islamic stance over its practice. Around the globe religious support for its practice is consider as a macro factor while in this study religious scholars consider it as a deviation from the Islamic teachings as Islam focuses on the virtues of mercy, kindness and affection while dealing with the children. Though Islam also supports corporal punishment for child behaviour correction but under certain conditions and guidelines which the adults ignore while practicing corporal punishment.

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this section main argumentations from the study will be concluded on the basis of which research-based framework will be provided for the abolishment of corporal punishment of children. With respect to support and non support for corporal punishment mix opinion were received as some participants were found supportive to its practice while some were against it. The participants consider overcrowded classrooms, inefficient teachers, poor academic tools, no teachers in service training, lack of accountability, no proper monitoring, culture acceptability and religious support as the main factors for its practice. On the other side of the coin, some participants consider it as a deviation from the Islamic teaching as Islam focuses on the virtues of mercy, kindness, affection and love while dealing with the children. The study concluded that corporal punishment leads to physical abuse, anti-social behaviour and increase aggression, poor cognitive development,

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<sup>4</sup> Hazrat Ali (RA) was the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He ruled as the fourth caliph from 656 to 661, and was first Imam of Shia Islam from 632 to 661.



## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, poor academics and school drop outs whilst some participants consider it beneficial for maintaining school discipline, classroom management and character building. The study concluded an alternative way of religious support for the practice of corporal punishment as Islam focuses on mercy, kindness and affection in dealing with the children and also directs to control one own anger while corporal punishment is the outcome for deviating from these virtues. Furthermore, it was also concluded that our socio-cultural and religious factors are the main barriers in the proper legislation to pact with the corporal punishment.

The study provided suggestions for the abolishment of corporal punishment children from schools including; reforming the educational system, creating mass awareness, providing proper training to teachers on the alternative method of behaviour modification, overcoming the teachers own issues and frustration, proper monitoring and accountability mechanism, proper legislation and most importantly following the real meaning of Islamic teachings in dealing with the children and for their socialization and character building process.

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## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

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