

Ending corporal punishment of children: Time for action is now!



LAILA KHONDKAR

"IS it OK to hit a child at least once in their lifetime?"—asked a Bangladeshi parent in a post on social media. Immediately, many

commented in favour of hitting children, mostly in the name of "discipline". We can never think of having a public discussion that justifies punishing any other group. Why do we accept this for children? Doesn't this reflect children's lower status in our society?

This is an opportune moment to discuss this issue with April 30 being observed as the International Day to End Corporal Punishment of Children. Corporal punishment includes any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, as well as non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading.

Corporal punishment violates children's human dignity and physical integrity and is a blatant violation of their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Around four in five children between the ages of 2 and 14 are subjected to some kind of violent discipline at homes (*Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, UNICEF, 2014).

There is a circular (2011) by the Ministry of Education banning corporal punishment in educational settings in Bangladesh. However, children continue to be beaten and humiliated by teachers. In addition, they are

subjected to corporal punishment at homes, workplaces, etc. According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, 89 percent of children (1-14 years) in Bangladesh experienced violent discipline in the month before the survey was conducted.

A "review of research on the effects of corporal punishment" by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2013 analysed 150 studies and presented a convincing case that corporal punishment is harmful for children, adults and societies. Since then, a huge amount of scientific research has clearly demonstrated the negative outcomes of corporal punishment, which affects children's physical and psychological health, cognitive development and education, and also damages parent-child relationship.

When adults hit their children in the name of discipline, children comply to avoid further punishment, but they do not internalise why that particular act/behaviour should be avoided. So it is very likely that they will repeat it. This means that punishment is ineffective as a disciplining technique. There are correlations between being punished as a child (as well as attitudes favourable to corporal punishment) and domestic violence in adulthood. If societies continue to allow corporal punishment of children, it will be impossible to break the intergenerational cycle of violence.

Even when we know corporal punishment is harmful, it remains legally permitted in many countries. Some 62 states across all regions of the world have enacted laws banning corporal punishment of children in all settings including homes, schools,



PHOTO: COLLECTED

workplaces, institutions, alternative care arrangements, etc. But 87 percent of the children globally are still not protected from corporal punishment by law. This includes Bangladeshi children as well.

When we have a legal system that states that assaulting an adult is an offence but assaulting a child is acceptable, the law is discriminating against the child and there is no equality under the law. Banning corporal punishment in all settings has become even more urgent during the Covid-19 pandemic, as it has placed millions of children everywhere at a greater risk of violence at homes.

From my experience of working in various countries including Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea and Liberia, I know that any initiative to introduce legal prohibition of corporal punishment is usually met with resistance by adults (parents, teachers, community members, policy makers, etc.). They repeatedly claim that beating by parents and teachers has been going on for long in societies, and that this is a common practice. But nothing could be justified

in the name of "tradition" if that hurts a human being.

Some argue that many parents are raising their children in challenging conditions and teachers are often under stress because of overcrowding and lack of resources, and thus, they often use corporal punishment as a "last resort". In reality, corporal punishment is often an outlet for adults to vent their personal frustrations rather than an attempt to educate children. In many households and institutions, adults need more resources and support. But hitting and humiliating children is never acceptable even when adults face difficulties. We must stop giving excuses to justify corporal punishment.

The primary aim of legislation banning corporal punishment in all settings is to send a clear message that violence against children will not be tolerated. It is not to prosecute parents or make them feel guilty. Research shows that legal reforms have led to reduced acceptance of corporal punishment among parents and other members of society. This has been the

case in Sweden, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Poland, and Romania. We also know that positive parenting programmes promote non-violent child rearing practices and can change perceptions and attitudes among parents, caregivers and other people working with children.

Ending corporal punishment is a human rights imperative and also essential if the world is to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (target 16.2) to end all violence against children by 2030. The following reforms should be considered: 1) All countries that have not yet achieved prohibition, including Bangladesh, should ban corporal punishment of children in all settings by 2030; 2) Legal reforms must be linked to awareness raising as well as developing capacity on positive, non-violent forms of parenting and education. The media can play a crucial role in campaigning to end corporal punishment of children and changing social attitudes so that adults treat children with respect and dignity; 3) The messages on positive discipline should be built into the training of all those who work with or for children and families, in health, education, and social services; and 4) Governments and other actors should engage with children and respect their views in all aspects of preventing and responding to corporal punishment.

Children have a right to equal legal protection, and it is extremely important for all of us that they grow up in a non-violent and peaceful environment. How long will it take for adults to understand something as simple as this?

Laila Khondkar is an international development worker.

The State of Research in Bangladesh



M. TAMIM

LATELY, the world university ranking systems, especially promoted by the private universities for attracting prospective students in Bangladesh,

have brought attention to the state of research in local universities. The quality of higher education in the country is also under the microscope. Historically, most of our universities were focused on offering quality undergraduate degrees. Only few of them had reasonably strong graduate programmes. Most of the newer universities struggle to start graduate studies and end up having a second-tier programme to justify calling themselves a university instead of a college. So, the culture of research never really took off.

Evaluating faculty members for review, promotion and tenure is a challenging job that has evolved with time. In the early eighties, effective teaching was considered the principal task of a faculty member. Now, it is necessary but not sufficient. More emphasis is given on strong research and publication over excellence in teaching and services. The Times Higher Education ranking started in 2004 and The QS University Ranking started in 2011. It takes a long time (maybe 10-12 years) and coordinated, sustained efforts from all stakeholders to develop a healthy and active research culture.

To create new knowledge, develop new products and services, or improve the old ones for human benefit requires research. The onus of doing research is not only on the universities. In 2016, the global industry spent 15 percent of its revenue on Research and Development (R&D). Both academia and industry need to cooperate and collaborate closely for the

advancement of the civilisation. The Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine development is an example of such cooperation that led to a great success.

In Bangladesh, no one talks about professional or industry research because it almost does not exist. There are a few private think tanks, non-profits and NGOs that are doing research on socio-economic issues, and a few government agencies like BRRI, BARI, BIDS, AEC, BCSIR, etc. in other sectors. Industry R&D in science, engineering and technology is non-existent. No one expects much basic research in a low-income country, but none of the industries in Bangladesh has even an active R&D department that conducts applied research to solve local problems. Most importantly, industries rarely approach universities to solve such problems. It implies that either they don't have any problem, or it is solved by local/overseas consultants.

The majority of the published research in Bangladesh are conducted by university faculty members and students. The quality of every faculty position is ensured by setting up qualifications in terms of academic results, publications and experience. Outside teaching experience, the publication requirement for assistant professor, associate professor and professor positions increases with the hierarchy from a minimum of three to fifteen publications. The quality of these publications varies and is judged differently in different universities. Generally, very few can attain associate or full professorship without a PhD degree.

The principal driving force for university research in Bangladesh is to attain qualification for the next higher position that substantially diminishes once one becomes a full professor. Of course, there are a number of faculty members in every university at every level who perform and produce high-quality research work, but unfortunately, there are not too many

of them. The question that needs to be asked is why Bangladeshi university faculty members lack the motivation to do research. Is it dearth of money, facilities or something else? After an extensive literature review, a study published in *The Social Science Journal* in 2016 identified six motivating factors for faculty research: achievement, enjoyment, work itself, recognition, rewards and pressure.

The last three—recognition, reward and pressure—are in the hands of the institutes. An organisational research environment can be established with institutional and individual leadership along with proper training and support. The greater challenge in Bangladesh is ensuring achievement, enjoyment and the work itself. STEM research in developing countries frequently follows issues and problems of high-income countries—especially in basic research—that do not have any local relevance. Seeing one's work that is locally relevant being applied, appreciated and making a difference in society gives one the highest feelings of achievement and joy. That is only possible if the universities have an active interaction with the local industries and the government. Unfortunately, both the industry and the government will generally involve foreign firms and consultants to resolve the critical problems. Despite that indifference, both agriculture and public health research have flourished in Bangladesh due to local relevancy.

In other sectors, sometimes even worthwhile findings of local custom research are not followed through, making the faculty members frustrated. As a result, they fall into the trap of doing research helping high-income countries for publication purposes, or producing lower-quality unpublisable work for the sake of churning out degrees. Finding a good graduate student interested in higher studies and research is another major hurdle for most of the faculty members in all

universities in Bangladesh.

Why would a student go to a graduate school after completing the bachelor's degree? The student would weigh the worth of the extra time and money needed for the higher degree. It is not an easy decision to make even for a good student. In my 25 years of teaching graduate programmes, I would ask every student one question: why are you here? Very rarely, I would get a clear answer. Fulfilling parents' wishes, switching subject for a better job prospect, and a platform for studying abroad, etc. are some of the answers I received. A vast majority just kept quiet. They simply didn't know what they were doing in the graduate programme. None of them ever told me that they were interested in research. To be fair to the students, some said they wanted to learn the subject, but these were mostly from the industry. This could be different in other streams.

Surveys among graduate students find many reasons why they want to pursue a higher degree. One dominant thread shows the expectation of getting an edge in the job market, long-term financial benefits, more responsibility at the job, and promotions. Unfortunately, none of these conditions exist in Bangladesh. Apart from universities and a few research institutes, no other job encourages or rewards a higher degree. Outside the universities, there are very few jobs that require a PhD degree. Once, professionals in all public jobs used to get at least one increment for having a graduate degree (master's or PhD). That practice has been abolished a long time ago. It seems the job market (at least public sector) is discouraging higher studies by design. Even the universities (both public and private) prefer overseas degrees for faculty recruitment, discarding candidates with a local graduate degree. The academically inclined students tend to go overseas when they see no job prospect or reward for having a higher

degree in the country.

Not only do graduate students help the faculty carry out their research work, but it is also an inherent part of their training. Research allows a student to learn solving problems individually or in a team environment. Without good graduate students, faculty research will be completely handicapped. To attract students in higher studies and research, a good job market with appropriate



Without good graduate students, faculty research will be completely handicapped. PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

responsibility and compensation must be created by both industry and the government. At the same time, the University Grants Commission has to ensure honesty and ethics in the pursuit of knowledge as well as the quality of the degrees offered by our universities. The creation of a conducive research culture in the country is a multi-stakeholder task. Leaving the responsibility to the universities only will never resolve the issue.

Dr. M. Tamim is a professor of petroleum engineering and dean of the Engineering Faculty at BUET.

QUOTABLE Quote

FRANKLIN P. ADAMS
(1881-1960)
American columnist

The best part of the fiction in many novels is the notice that the characters are purely imaginary.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Assess
- 5 Loses energy
- 10 Blissful spots
- 12 Fable writer
- 13 Absurd
- 15 Stretch of years
- 16 Negating word
- 17 Yale rooter
- 18 Continued
- 20 Peeved state
- 21 Intent look
- 22 Lofty poems
- 23 Enjoy the taste of
- 25 "Get lost!"
- 28 Stage direction
- 31 Arrived
- 32 Approached
- 34 Clean Water

Act org.

- 35 Sch. supporters
- 36 West of films
- 37 Unremarkable
- 40 Supply with funds
- 41 Radio dial
- 42 Theater units
- 43 "American Gigolo" star

DOWN

- 1 Extend, as a subscription
- 2 Loves to pieces
- 3 Lease signer
- 4 Print units
- 5 Speedy
- 6 Floral garland
- 7 Climb

8 Player in a mask

- 9 Breaks apart
- 11 Lady of Spain
- 14 Anticlimactic situations
- 19 Refinement
- 20 In a way, informally
- 24 Short play
- 25 Play parts
- 26 Ness nemesis
- 27 Mystery writer
- 29 Royal fur
- 30 Farm machine
- 33 Raison -
- 35 Chapel seating
- 38 Period
- 39 Floor cover

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WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS

A	D	A	M	S	P	A	I	N
L	I	L	A	P	R	I	M	E
A	V	O	N	O	O	M	P	A
M	A	N	I	L	O	A	T	E
O	N	E	C	E	L	L	L	E
S	T	I	R	S	M	A	S	T
H	I	R	E	D	I	N		
O	R	O	M	A	N	I	A	C
V	A	N	I	N	I	T	I	A
E	D	M	U	N	D	O	R	C
S	E	A	N	C	E	B	E	A
S	N	E	E	R	A	D	O	S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

SO, JUST RELAX AND TELL ME WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND...

OKAY, I'LL TRY, BUT SARGE HAS ME REALLY STRESSED OUT...

BEETLE?

ZZZZ

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

GREETINGS, EARTH WOMAN.

I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THE HAMDALORIAN ACT, MISTER.

TAKE THAT THING OFF.

THE HAMDALORIAN DOES NOT REMOVE HIS HELMET.

HE DOES THE NEXT TIME HE USES THE BATHROOM!

AFFIRMATIVE.