

## Executive Summary

Corporal punishment is an **epidemic form of violence against children** that is widely not recognised as such in our society. There has been little effort to understand why it prevails in our homes and in our schools, despite the latter being illegal. It has been a decade since the government conducted two larger studies to assess the magnitude of the problem, but to this day no systematic or large-scale research has been done to understand the factors that put our children at risk. Our report addresses this gap and provides detailed insight into the drivers behind school corporal punishment in Gurugram's disadvantaged communities, explaining how and why children of parents who have migrated here experience corporal punishment at school. Our findings are derived from qualitative research, including a survey among 100 children, three focus group discussions with 29 parents, and semi-structured interviews with 40 children and 12 teachers from two government schools.

### School corporal punishment in India

Physical punishment and mental harassment of students by their teachers is **outlawed by at least fifteen legal and regulatory policies** in India, notably the **UN Child Rights Convention**, of which India is a signatory since 1992, and the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009**. However, despite its legal ban the practice of school corporal punishment remains epidemic. According to government data, at least **65% of children are physically punished** by teachers. Counting in mental harassment, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights found in its 2009/10 study that **99.9% of children experience corporal punishment at school**.

### How disadvantaged children experience school corporal punishment

**Age** - Usually, older children are less likely to experience corporal punishment. However, disadvantaged children face it to **similar extent across all ages**, though in different forms.

**Frequency** - Corporal punishment is a **daily routine in government schools**. Almost all of the students from underprivileged background see or experience it every day, usually several times, compared to a nationwide average of “only” two-thirds of all children.

**Forms** - Disadvantaged children experience both “mild” and severe forms of **physical punishment** as well as **verbal harassment** referring to their “**bad upbringing**.”

**Gender** - There are **gender-specific forms** of punishment and girls experience sexist verbal abuse related to their age, weight, appearance and marriage prospects. While in **lower primary school both boys and girls are beaten** with similar extent and frequency, **boys in upper primary school receive more physical punishment** than girls.

**Teachers** - Most teachers mete out corporal punishment on their students out of routine and in **ritualised forms**, for example when they hit students on their knuckles for incomplete homework. But every school appears to have one or two notorious teachers who subject children to **brutal and sadistic forms of violence**. There are also a **few teachers who do not use corporal punishment** at all.

**Parents** - **Almost all parents (91%) approve of (school) corporal punishment** and 74% admit that they use it at home. The large majority of parents (70%) punish their children when they find out that their children were punished by teachers at school.

## Risk factors for disadvantaged children to receive corporal punishment at school

Our research has identified **four major risk factors** why marginalised children are at a higher risk to experience physical and mental abuse by their school teachers:

**Low income** - Parents with low income **lack the financial resources** to provide their children with good education. They work long hours in the informal sector and are **unavailable to their children** and **cannot afford better schools** for them. These parents are often not educated and **lack the knowledge and emotional resources** to support their children's education. This manifests in the **children's inability to complete homework** which is the number one reason to receive corporal punishment at school.

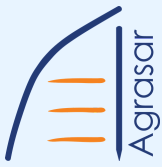
**"Migrant" background** - Children of low-income rural labourers often struggle to articulate themselves through proper language, and are **frequently absent from school**. They face **social stigma and prejudice** for being a "migrant" and are **discriminated against by teachers** and the local community. Often, teachers do not deem children from **weak socio-economic background or lower castes** worthy of education and humane treatment, and they are not able to maintain a constructive working relationship with their students' parents.

**Government schools foster an environment that puts children at risk to experience violence** - Insufficient infrastructure in government schools and challenging working conditions lead to enormous **frustration among teachers**. They rarely show awareness for professional conduct and ethics, which could prevent them from taking out their anger on children. Teachers also **lack professional training** to use alternative discipline methods and to support children in their learning process. **Inadequate school governance**, in particular non-existent procedures to deal with teacher misconduct and to enforce the legal ban of school corporal punishment, allows teachers to "get away."

**Our social norms and culture of disregard for children** - Despite paying lip service that "children are our future", our society shows an **utter disregard for children as human beings with inviolable rights**. Popular myths, misperceptions about its effectiveness, and our social norms **justify the physical and mental abuse of children**, as long as it comes with the **intention to "punish."** Children are viewed as **property of their parents** and as **"mischievous"** creatures who "need to be broken for their betterment." Both parents and teachers have **unrealistic expectations** and punish children for **normal child-like behaviour**. Especially children from lower classes of society are considered unworthy of humane treatment, and are shamed and ignored as victims of violence.

## How children feel about corporal punishment by teachers

A vast body of research has proven the **negative effects of corporal punishment on children's physical and mental health, their behaviour and education**, and society at large. The evidence for the negative long-term impacts on children is compelling and leaves no doubt that corporal punishment is bad for children. The objective of our research was not to add to the body of research on long-term consequences, but to highlight **how corporal punishment makes children feel** and how they view the matter. Sadly, the findings are devastating.



**Fear, humiliation and shame** - Corporal punishment makes children feel **humiliated and ashamed of themselves**, to the point where they **would not admit** to it, but only say that “the other kids” have received it. It instills fear in children and makes them **afraid of school** and develop negative associations with school and education.

**Broken relationships with teachers and parents** - Corporal punishment undermines healthy and trusted relationships of children with their parents and teachers. Out of fear to be punished, they **stop sharing negative experiences with their parents**, which adds to the “culture of silence” around violence and makes them **vulnerable to fall prey to other forms of abuse**.

**Loss of natural instincts and moral compass** - Children do not like corporal punishment, but are constantly told by adults that it was good for them, leading them to **distrust their natural instincts** and their own ideas about right and wrong. This makes young people **internalise violence as acceptable social behaviour** and thus more likely to become violent adolescents and adults, which feeds into the **vicious cycle of violence in India**.

### We need to act to make schools safe for our children

Corporal punishment is an **epidemic socially acceptable violence against children**, perpetuating the brutality and cruelty against certain groups in our society, especially women and children. Given that school corporal punishment is illegal under numerous legal and regulatory frameworks in India, there is no urgency to lobby for policy or legal change. Instead, we need to **challenge the social norms that enable its continuation** and enforce our laws on the ground. To this end, Agrasar has launched its **Kaagaz Ki Kashti as a solidarity against school corporal punishment**. “Kaagaz Ki Kashti” means “paper boat,” like the ones we used to float during our own childhood. The term illustrates how fragile and vulnerable children can be if they are mistreated and disrespected. The objectives of this initiative are to work with teachers, parents and children in their communities to **educate them about corporal punishment** and its negative effects, and enable them to **adopt non-violent positive discipline** methods. In addition, we seek to **raise awareness** for the problem among the wider public, **initiate debate** and create momentum for **sustainable long-term social change**.

#### ABOUT AGRASAR

Agrasar is a social impact organisation (NGO) working with disadvantaged communities in India to further equitable access to education, safe schooling, employability and livelihood opportunities.

Our operations are centred in Gurugram spreading out to nearby regions directly or in partnership with community based organisations. We believe ourselves to be an integral part of the community we work with.

Our team has grown phenomenally with experiences from the field, not just professionally but personally. We learn each time we interact with our primary stakeholders and varied people and institutions we come across. Hence, our tagline “Progressing with the community”