



Global Initiative to  
**End All Corporal Punishment  
of Children**

## **The World We Want consultation, March 2014**

### **Submission from the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children**

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The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children suggests the inclusion of prohibition and elimination of violent punishment of children, under focus area 19, "Peaceful and non-violent societies, capable institutions", under which it is suggested that "reduction of crime, violence, abuse, exploitation, including against children and women" could be included.

Prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment of children is a fundamental right and an essential element of a human rights-based approach to development. Violent punishment of children, in the family home and other settings of their lives, is the most common form of violence against children, and clear baselines for measuring progress towards its prohibition and elimination have been developed, including through UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) on the prevalence of violent punishment of children.<sup>1</sup>

Ending corporal punishment is essential in creating peaceful and non-violent societies, based on respect for human rights. Prohibition of corporal punishment is a well-established human rights imperative. In its General Comment No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, the Committee on the Rights of the Child made it very clear that all states parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are required to prohibit and eliminate all corporal punishment of children, in the family home and all other settings of their lives, and it consistently recommends prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment to states it examines. The Human Rights Committee, the Committee Against Torture, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have all recommended prohibition of all corporal punishment of children. The issue has been extensively covered in the Universal Periodic Review of states' overall human rights records. In this context, there is growing progress towards prohibition: as at March 2014, 36 states have prohibited corporal punishment in all settings and a further 47 have made public commitments to doing so. A table summarizing the legal status of corporal punishment of children in all states is attached.

As the Committee on the Rights of the Child has said, ending corporal punishment is "a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies".<sup>2</sup> There is overwhelming evidence that

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (2014), *The State of the World's Children 2014 in Numbers: Every Child Counts*, NY: UNICEF

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006), *General Comment No. 8: The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia)*, para. 3

violent punishment of children is associated with increased aggression, antisocial and delinquent behaviour in children and with violence and involvement in criminal behaviour in children and adults.<sup>3</sup> Violent punishment of children is closely linked to other forms of family violence, including intimate partner violence: the two kinds of violence often coexist<sup>4</sup> and experience of corporal punishment as a child is associated with an increased risk of involvement in intimate partner violence as an adult as both perpetrator and victim. Efforts to end corporal punishment – this damaging and most common form of violence against children – are essential in building peaceful, non-violent societies, including preventing violent crime.

Prohibition of corporal punishment is also important for focus area 3, "Health and population dynamics", including the suggested topics of eliminating preventable child deaths and eliminating harmful practices. The huge prevalence of corporal punishment contributes significantly to the deaths and injuries of young children. Most physical "child abuse" is corporal punishment: research has consistently found that the majority of incidents substantiated by authorities as abuse occur in a punitive context. A major Canadian study found that nearly three quarters of all cases of "substantiated physical abuse" were cases of physical punishment.<sup>5</sup> And all violent punishment violates children's rights and places them at increased risk of further violence. Physical punishment carries an inbuilt risk of escalation: its effectiveness in controlling children's behavior decreases over time, encouraging the punisher to increase the intensity of the punishment. Research shows how "light smacks" can all too easily escalate to more violent assault which may ultimately be fatal.

Corporal punishment is associated with a range of negative developmental outcomes, including poor mental and physical health in children and adults. Ending the legality and practice of corporal punishment of children is recognized by major international health professionals' organisations as a key strategy to improve the physical and mental health and other developmental outcomes for children and adults. In 2013, nine major international health organisations issued a statement calling for all governments to work for the prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment and all organisations working for health to include the issue in their work. The statement, together with a summary of research which documents the negative impact of corporal punishment on the health of children and adults, is attached.

Ending corporal punishment in schools, day care and other education settings is essential for focus area 4, "Education". As well as violating children's right to respect for their physical integrity and human dignity, corporal punishment in schools and other education settings violates children's right to education. Yet violent punishment remains lawful in schools in 76 states worldwide, and in day care (such as early childhood care and education settings) in 156 states. Further detail is available in the attached table of the legality of corporal punishment.

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<sup>3</sup> Gershoff, E. T. (2002), "Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review", *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(4), 539-579

<sup>4</sup> Lansford, J. E. et al (2014), "Attitudes Justifying Domestic Violence Predict Endorsement of Corporal Punishment and Physical and Psychological Aggression towards Children: A Study in 25 Low- and Middle-Income Countries", *The Journal of Pediatrics*, published online 9 January 2014

<sup>5</sup> Trocmé, N. et al (2010), *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Executive Summary & Chapters 1-5*, Public Health Agency of Canada: Ottawa, 2010; see also Jud, A. & Trocmé, N. (2013), *Physical Abuse and Physical Punishment in Canada*, Child Canadian Welfare Research Portal Information Sheet # 122