



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

## **Ending corporal punishment: a key element in preventing interpersonal violence, in particular against women and children**

### **Comments on Draft One of the WHO global plan of action to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multi-sectoral response to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children**

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The Global Initiative welcomes the publication of the Second WHO Discussion Paper containing Draft One of the Global plan of action to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multi-sectoral response to address interpersonal violence in particular against women and girls and against children, and the opportunity to share further comments in response to the revised draft plan.

The Global Initiative welcomes and fully supports the vision, goal and objectives of the global action plan, as well as its strategic directives and guiding principles, and agrees with the roles and actions set out for Member States, national and international partners and the WHO Secretariat. In particular, we welcome the inclusion in the revised draft of:

1. Specific reference to corporal punishment in considering the magnitude of violence against children globally (p.3);
2. Specific reference to laws and policies to prevent corporal punishment in all settings under the strategic direction to Member States and national and international partners to advocate for laws and policies, and enforce existing laws and policies, to prevent violence against children and adolescents in all settings (p.20); and
3. The definition of corporal punishment in the Glossary of key terms (p.37<sup>1</sup>).

This submission sets out four amendments to the revised draft that seek to highlight the scale of corporal punishment globally, its negative health and behavioural outcomes and how it contributes to the prevalence of other forms of interpersonal violence. We believe their inclusion in the global action plan would strengthen the message that corporal punishment should be prohibited and eliminated.

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<sup>1</sup> We recommend the following amendment to footnote 15: “~~Convention~~ Committee on the rights of the child...”

### 1. Introduction/ Health consequences (p.4)

The Global Initiative is aware of over 200 studies which associate corporal punishment with a wide range of negative health, developmental and behavioural outcomes for children that can follow them into adulthood. These include, but are not limited to, death and serious physical injury, mental and indirect physical harm, impaired cognitive development, increased aggression, violent and antisocial behaviour and severely damaged parent-child relationships.<sup>2</sup> While evidence of the effects of violence against children, including violent punishment, are entirely relevant in the present context, and of course helpful for advocacy, we recommend that the introduction notes that such evidence is not needed in order to know that it must immediately be prohibited and eliminated. Corporal punishment, like all forms of violence against children, breaches children's fundamental rights to respect for human dignity and physical integrity, and its legality in the majority of states worldwide – in contrast to other forms of interpersonal violence – challenges the universal right to equal protection under the law.

### 2. Introduction/ Figure 1 (p.5)

We recommend that the prevalence of corporal punishment – the most common form of violence against children<sup>3</sup> – be included in Figure 1 (p.5) which summarises data on the magnitude of some of the common forms of violence across the life-course. UNICEF statistics collected in 62 countries between 2005 and 2013 found that on average about four in five children aged 2-14 had experienced violent “discipline” (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) at home in the past month. On average, 17% of children experienced severe physical punishment (being hit on the head, face or ears or hit hard and repeatedly) at home in the past month.<sup>4</sup> The Global Initiative can provide global and regional compilations of research on the prevalence of, and attitudes towards, corporal punishment; these can be downloaded at [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/research/prevalence-research/](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/research/prevalence-research/).

### 3. Introduction/ Progress in countries and gaps (p.6)

Paragraph 15 of the Overview of the global situation considers laws that address some forms of violence. The Global Initiative has mapped the legality of corporal punishment of children in every state and territory worldwide; we have also summarised research on the (positive) impact of prohibition of corporal punishment in states which have achieved law reform. We recommend the following amendment to paragraph 15 (additional text underlined): “15. *Laws are in place to address some forms of violence, but in many states legislation is inadequate. Where laws are in place, but their enforcement is weak.* Most countries report having laws in place that penalise at least some forms of violence, including some forms of violence against women and girls (e.g. domestic violence, rape), and against children. Few countries, however, are fully enforcing their laws against these and other forms of violence. Nevertheless, prohibition in law is an essential foundation for securing rights to

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<sup>2</sup> Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2015), *Corporal punishment of children: review of research on its impact and associations, Working paper*, London: Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children

<sup>3</sup> Pinheiro, P. S. (2006), *World Report on Violence against Children*, Geneva: United Nations

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF (2014), *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, NY: UNICEF

protection (e.g. 46 states have achieved this in relation to prohibition of all corporal punishment; a further 52 are committed to doing so). When law reform is accompanied by dissemination of the law, appropriate enforcement and public and professional education and awareness-raising, it leads to a reduction in perpetration of violence and in society's tolerance of it (e.g. this has been documented in some countries which have prohibited all corporal punishment)."

#### **4. Section 3A. Violence against women and girls**

The Global Initiative recommends it be acknowledged that ending corporal punishment is a key element in ending family violence. The home can never be free from violence so long as physical punishment of children is legally and socially acceptable. Corporal punishment and partner violence are closely linked – the two kinds of violence often coexist and experiencing corporal punishment as a child increases the chance of both being a victim of and perpetrating intimate partner violence as an adult. Research suggests that settings in which corporal punishment is prevalent tend to be settings in which partner violence is prevalent,<sup>5</sup> and that women who believe that husbands are justified in hitting their wives are more likely to believe that corporal punishment is necessary to rear children than women who did not believe that husbands were justified in hitting their wives.<sup>6</sup> Studies have also found associations between men experiencing harsh corporal punishment as a child and perpetuating “dating violence” as an adult.<sup>7</sup>

*Briefing prepared by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children*  
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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, C. A. et al (2012), “Use of Spanking for 3-Year-Old Children and Associated Intimate Partner Aggression or Violence”, *Pediatrics*, 126(3), 415-424

<sup>6</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>7</sup> Simons, L. G. et al (2008), “A test of explanations for the effect of harsh parenting on the perpetration of dating violence and sexual coercion among college males”, *Violence and Victims*, 23(1), 66-82