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Rapid response to:

Amend the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to protect children from assault

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Du Zhicheng

PhD candidate

Institute of Biopharmaceutical and Health Engineering, Shenzhen International Graduate School, Tsinghua University, Shenzhen 518055, China.

Shenzhen

Rapid Response:

After banning corporal punishment, what else do we need to do?

Dear Editor

After banning corporal punishment, what else do we need to do?

Every child deserves to grow up in safety, but how can the law truly be their shield? A recent opinion article called for an amendment to the bill to ban corporal punishment of children in England altogether (1). This is undoubtedly a big step forward, but after reading the article, I felt a little uneasy: If the law is passed, then what?

The core logic of the article is clear and powerful—to remove the "reasonable punishment" defense and free children from violence just as much as adults (2). The authors support this with positive data from other countries that have banned corporal punishment, such as Finland and Sweden, where rates of corporal punishment have declined. This is compelling, but the problem is that these countries did not succeed solely on the basis of a ban. There is a whole support system behind them, from rental education to changing social attitudes. The article says almost nothing about it.

Will a law banning corporal punishment end violence?

The authors' assumption that changes to the law will automatically lead to behavioral change may be too optimistic. Imagine that a parent who is used to beating and scolding is suddenly told that "this is illegal, but there are no alternative methods; the result may be twofold: either fear of the law to suppress emotions, accumulating greater family conflicts, or going "underground" and hiding the violence. The real challenge is not the legislation itself, but getting it on the ground.

More important than a ban is teaching people "how not to use corporal punishment."

Corporal punishment often stems from a sense of powerlessness—when parents or teachers don't know how to respond to a child's behavior, violence becomes the quickest "solution." After the prohibition of corporal punishment, society needs to provide more specific tools. Schools have added emotional management courses to help teachers deal with classroom conflict. The cost, resource allocation, and policy coherence of these measures

are not covered in the article. Without support, laws can become castles in the air and even add to educators' frustration.

Beyond the law, a 'gentle revolution' is needed.

The deeper problem is that the legitimacy of corporal punishment has long been rooted in the cultural notion of "spare the rod, spoil the rod." Laws can be changed overnight, but it takes time to change hearts. The article, on the other hand, only focuses on the parliamentary vote but ignores the importance of mass mobilization and cultural reconstruction. Without public support, the new law may face enforcement resistance and even be stigmatized as "government interference in parenting."

Conclusion: Give the law a pair of walking shoes.

A ban on corporal punishment is necessary, but the law cannot go it alone. What is needed is not just a ban but a one-two punch: from a family education resource pack to a community support network to a reshaping of public awareness. Only in this way can the law be transformed from justice on paper into a smile on the face of a child. Otherwise, the perfect article may stumble in reality—and the price will eventually be borne by the child.

References

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