

Policy, social norms, and professional development in implementing public management reform: The challenge of ending corporal punishment in Egyptian schools

Nevine Henry Rezk Saad Wasef

Abstract

Egypt's government has outlawed corporal punishment (CP) in schools by decree but to date has stopped short of fully prohibiting it in law. Despite the stated policy, CP continues to be widely practiced in both public and private schools. Survey data show that as many as 90 percent of Egyptian students experience school-based CP (NCCM and UNICEF 2005). Reduction in CP rates has emerged as an important concern for educational administration and public policy, not only because it is outlawed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but because research has consistently found that CP leads to poorer educational outcomes and reduces students' ability to learn. CP thus undermines achievement of the principal metrics for public management performance in the education sector, student learning outcomes. Reducing CP has proven difficult because the practice has become so deeply embedded in society, in schools, and in teachers' classroom management. Its elimination thus poses a complex challenge requiring a mix of public policy, human resource management, and administrative reforms. This paper brings a new perspective to this debate, examining elimination of CP through a governance lens and applying this approach to analyze this challenge in Egypt. It uses an original dataset drawn from a survey of 300 students, parents, and teachers covering both public and private schools. It analyzes CP practices in Egyptian public and private schools, their perceived impacts on students, and stakeholder views on alternative reform measures. It addresses the research question, How do CP practices and attitudes on CP's disciplinary role and impact differ between public and private school stakeholders in Egypt? To explore this question, it applies the data to test six hypotheses covering public-private school differences regarding rates of CP use, teachers' attitudes and beliefs on CP and its disciplinary role (administrative acceptability), parents' attitudes toward CP (social acceptability) is more accepted by public school teachers and school

officials), parental engagement in schools and expectations regarding school responsiveness (governance), student attitudes and experience regarding CP and its impacts, and effectiveness of CP as a disciplinary tool as reported by these stakeholders. It also examines gendered experience with CP. The analysis draws on the survey and interviews with ministry officials, NGOs, international organizations, and other experts. Study findings confirm the unacceptably high levels of CP practices in Egyptian schools, that the use of CP differs strongly between public and private school students; male-female differences, by contrast, are more limited than anticipated. CP victims and their parents report that it leads to higher levels of anger as well as reduced student respect for teachers. The study finds that school administrators and social workers do not provide an effective check on CP in part because they are also participants in CP themselves, underscoring the difficulty of public management reform where there are systemic failures and potential norm conflicts between stakeholder beliefs and the policies adopted. Parents, teacher, and students agreed that teachers require concrete, more effective alternatives to CP to manage student misbehavior, notably promotion of positive discipline methods and training in their use. The study finds that private school teachers and parents hold similar views, as do parents in both types of school, but that public school teachers are significantly more favorable toward CP. This supports the conclusion that private school governance is more responsive to stakeholder interests than public school governance. The study concludes that elimination of CP will require a more holistic approach involving not only tightening regulations and providing training for teachers, but strengthening public school governance by engaging parents and students as allies in reforming disciplinary methods and, more generally, as engaged and informed stakeholders in school decision-making. Together, these measures offer a pathway to narrow the gap between policy and implementation, to strengthen public management and outcomes from the public education sector.

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