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## **INVESTIGATING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN REFUGEE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DADAAB, KENYA**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is a modified version of a Major Research Paper for the Master of Education degree at York University as part of the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees project, which provides virtual education to refugees in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya.

This research study is about the implications of corporal punishment in secondary schools in Dadaab Refugee Complex. It is based on different experiences the four interviewed participants encountered in primary and secondary schools, for an extended duration of over 20 years of the implementation of Kenyan curriculum in the camps. Examining the participants' life in schools and the use of corporal punishment as a means of discipline reveals the brutality it has inflicted in the bodies of learners and how violence in learning institutions is problematic. Participants narrated the most difficult corporal punishment encounters. The international community advocates for the delivery of quality education for refugee learners. However, the findings of this study raise the question of the quality of this education, implemented in a hostile environment such as that narrated by the student participants who went through Dadaab schools. Despite corporal punishment, participants stated that because of support from family and friends, they would still pursue their education and today they see themselves as the possible change makers.

The researcher believes that discussions around this issue are vital for sourcing both local and outside solutions. Corporal punishment is a serious issue in refugee schools that negatively impacts students, with short-term impacts like injuries and long-term impacts like dropping out of school. However, teacher training, anti-violence policies, and future research can contribute to ending this violence in schools.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

I joined teaching in Ifo Refugee Camp in 1997 when there was a need to shift the education system from the Somali to the Kenyan curriculum. I piloted the change in curriculum with ten students who were between 17 and 20 years old. The experiences of those students and the security situation at that time were very traumatizing, because there were always fresh memories of violence in their countries of origin and in the camp.

“

Hardly a day passed without news of someone raped, brutally murdered or killed, looted, kidnapped, beaten, or verbally abused.

”

The ten students were a unique cohort that gave me different knowledge about how to teach in a refugee situation, focusing only on delivering quality education – yet without teacher training. The students were challenging and ethnocentric (during this time, because of clan affiliations, the students were not always friendly to one another, or to people who were not Muslim or Somali). Yet, at the same time, the students were intelligent, amazing and very cute. As a refugee teacher, I found it stimulating that I played a special role of getting these students to trust me in every subject that I taught by committing to understand each student's level of knowledge and understanding. When I was transferred to another school to continue with the Kenyan curriculum in 1998, I was surprised to find teachers beat up students as a mean of discipline.

Corporal punishment has been defined differently over time and across countries.

## corporal punishment

incorporates the following activities:

1. blows to any part of a child's body,
2. verbally abusing,
3. forcing a child to perform physically painful or damaging acts,
4. deliberately neglecting a child's needs,
5. confining a child in a contained space,
6. any threat of physical punishment [...]

Ager (2013).

While there are alternative forms of punishment, not necessarily corporal punishment, secondary schools in Dadaab camps still practise this primitive form of punishment on their students. The paradoxical part in the refugee settlement is that schools are administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN organization mandated to protect refugees and address their social and humanitarian needs.

Whereas the UN definition purely deals with corporal punishment on a child, the majority of students who attend secondary schools in the refugee camps are above 18 years of age. Some are even married women and men who felt the need for further education. The story of a refugee, of how she or he came to be a refugee, is, in most cases, filled with scenarios of running or escaping from horrible experiences of death, rape, persecutions, beatings and so on. They left their homes and property for safety, comfort and decency, crossed international borders and sought sanctuary in a country of asylum – in this case, Kenya.


**Here again, in the refugee context, a similar story of violence experienced in an institution of learning brings back to life the memory of violence that forced them to leave their countries of origin in the first place.**

According to Lansford et al. (2009), how someone disciplines a person will have many effects, including influencing the means of discipline that the person will use on others in the future. Personally, I could not find the 35 minutes allotted for the lessons enough to fully engage with the content of the school subjects, yet, some teachers could still have time to use corporal punishment and start physical fights with their students. In 2019, I was conducting a training with the undergraduate students from Educational Studies, York University as their course assistant. While discussing one of the course topics, “Peace and Conflict Resolution,” one of the course participants had this statement to say about his experiences in a refugee primary school:

“All of the teachers were so terrible in terms of caning the pupils [...] Two students used to go together to the toilet. One day, the teacher realized that these two pupils were misbehaving [...] They were beaten terribly; first the headteacher and their teacher beat them seriously. They were directed to the police officers. Those two police officers put the butt of the gun on the learners.”

What the student saw done on his classmates will live with him for ever. The use of excessive force in criminalizing minor offences in learning institutions, using police officers, is commonly used by school administrators on the learners. This research study basically lifts the curtain to kick-start conversations around corporal punishment in refugee schools. There is a need for us to think about the short and long-term repercussions of punishments learners receive in schools. In this study, even learners who only witnessed the way their classmates were treated became affected!

When a secondary school was established in 2000, I left teaching in primary and became a secondary school teacher. After four years of secondary schooling, those learners who had been beaten can also become teachers in schools in the camps. When it comes to discipline, as Lansford et al. (2009) tell us,

 **teachers will use the same means of discipline on their students as they received as students, because that is what they know. That makes the cycle of corporal punishment continue.**

The topic of corporal punishment deserves to be considered because it is the students of today that will be future teachers and future leaders of their countries of origin.

There are some schools of thought that advocate for corporal punishment to maintain culture in homes and institutions, and in order to avoid chaos and evil from children and adults (Turner 2002; Salt 1916). However, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 16.2, world leaders endorsed and committed their countries and themselves to end every form of violence by 2030 (Butchart 2015). This SDG advocates to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. So, the refugee students in secondary schools in Dadaab camps, and elsewhere, are also entitled to be humanely treated in their learning institutions. They should be protected against corporal punishment, which is a form of violence perpetuated on a human body.

Another cynical aspect of the use of corporal punishment in the camps is that Windle International Kenya (WIK), which provides secondary education to refugees, has a famous slogan: Education Transforms Society. The meaning of this slogan, however, is not reflected in any essence with the continuation of corporal punishment in secondary schools in the Dadaab camps..

My research centered on three alumni and one student of secondary schools in Dadaab refugee camps who have experienced corporal punishment. I wanted to know their outlooks towards corporal punishment and to understand the issues that caused them to be beaten. I hope that my paper will provide knowledge and understanding about how the lives of students in secondary schools in Dadaab camps are violently and authoritatively managed despite the stated values of the organizations that implement education in the camps. Most importantly, like Hinchey (2008), I hope this study will provide an avenue for actions to end this violence.

Personally, this project affects me significantly because I am a parent of children who were born in the refugee camp. I am concerned about their school environment. My story of running from Uganda is that of war, imprisonment, hunger, corporal punishment, violence and so on. The stories of my children and other children in the refugee camps, I am worried, are the same stories as their fathers, mothers and the rest of their displaced family members because of the existence of corporal punishment in schools.

## 2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Greydanus et al. who researched corporal punishment stated, “corporal punishment against children has received support for thousands of years from interpretation of legal and religious doctrines, including those beliefs based on Judeo-Christian and other religions” (2003: 385). They however oppose the use of corporal punishment on children because it has negative effects on both the mental and physical well-being of the child. Rajalakshmi stated that

“

the use of corporal punishment has not just physical, emotional and psychological consequences but could have a major role in retarding the process of normal brain development (2018: 28).

”

From this perspective, corporal punishment uses force to narrow and block the mind of students/victims from being inquisitive in their thinking. This system controls students from thinking beyond the prescribed educational curriculum.

Some research results support the use of corporal punishment in schools, as something that can help improve children’s performance (Alsaif 2015; Gomba 2015). These researchers documented what they claimed, according to their findings, were advantages of corporal punishment to students.

Despite their findings, the researchers still argue that corporal punishment is bad. I agree with Alsaif (2015) and Gomba (2015) that

“

teachers who are not very qualified, and do not know how to teach “difficult students” or do not have in place any mechanism to deal with or counsel those students normally resort to corporal punishment.

”

The phrase “difficult student” is one that is not consistent and can be subjectively used depending on teacher belief systems. Moreover, the so-called “difficult students” cannot be difficult to all the teachers in a given school. My research is focused on identifying why some teachers in the refugee secondary schools find some students to be “difficult” and why they think that corporal punishment is the best way to improve students’ performance and discipline.



## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 IDENTIFYING THE SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

In order to carry out this research study, I collected my data from different schools in Dadaab refugee camps. At the time of my study, there were nine secondary schools run by UNHCR. Each camp had three secondary schools, which were operated by Windle International Kenya which replaced CARE International in Kenya in 2010. I am familiar with the school operations in the refugee camps. I worked as a teacher in Ifo Secondary School from 2000 to 2004 when I changed to work in the same school as a laboratory assistant. I continued with this second responsibility until I left Ifo Secondary School in April 2018. Based on my experience as a teacher and as non-teaching staff in secondary school education, it was important for me to address this issue of corporal punishment that I silently watched under my eyes and about which no one dared to talk.

When I joined York University in 2014 at Dadaab, I started to interact with classmates from Hagadera and Dagahaley camps and learned that the majority went through severe corporal punishment while in primary and secondary schools. In the Bachelor of Arts courses that I took, I did not find any theory that could help me understand this corporal punishment situation. I continued to ponder how much corporal punishment impacted the refugee students. Many children were enrolled in lower primary schools and the majority were girls.



As they go higher in their studies, more girls than boys dropped out of school.

In the past, studies were done which attributed girls dropping out of school to cultural practices that favour boys over girls with regards to education.

**No study was done to identify how much corporal punishment really contributed to low enrollment, dropout rates, and overall performance of students in camps.**

I chose to conduct this study with four participants who would represent all the camps. There was also a need to think about the time span of education in the refugee context, which entailed getting participants who represented the different stages of education in Dadaab across the camps. The four participants from three different schools in two camps were identified as students who went through corporal punishment. It was easy to locate the male participants. However, many females who would have been potential participants had left the camps or become wives and mothers. Interviewing them would require getting consent of the husbands, as per tradition in the Dadaab camp, and other demands of this tradition would have interfered with the data collection.

Nevertheless, despite all the challenges, in the end I was able to get one female participant who was single and working as a teacher. I approached her and interviewed her without going through a second party. The participants were interviewed in places of their choice for their safety and confidentiality.

When I first thought of doing this study, I considered going to a secondary school and engaging in an observational field study where I would identify my interview participants who would be teachers and students. That did not materialize because no school would welcome me with this research question. School authorities requested that I change the topic if I wanted to conduct a study in their schools. This repeated refusal further motivated me to research corporal punishment. Through my supervisor, Dr. Dlamini, I was able to modify my research methodology to collect my data without interference from any school.

As a refugee and someone who taught in Dadaab, I was able to get my participants through selective sampling. Participants ranged in the years of experiencing corporal punishment.

**The first participant experienced it in 2001 in primary school and in 2003 in secondary school, the second participant experienced it in 2012 in secondary school, the third was punished in 2014 in primary school and in 2016 in secondary school, and the fourth participant was punished while in secondary school in 2019.**

This timeline of experiences shows the continuation of corporal punishment within the refugee schools. I am therefore addressing an ongoing issue, which many non-governmental organizations dealing with education in the refugee camps have not taken action to stop.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age
Abdi	Male	Early 30s
Juma	Male	Mid-twenties
Amina	Female	Late twenties
Tom	Male	Early twenties

The non-governmental organizations responsible for primary and secondary schools in Dadaab camps have changed over time. However, as my timeline above shows, the use of corporal punishment has continued, regardless of the responsible organization, whether it was CARE International from 1992 to 2011, the African Development in Emergency Organization, Islamic Relief Kenya from 2013 to 2017, or the Lutheran World Federation, mostly since 2018. At the time of doing my study, all primary schools were under Lutheran World Federation and all secondary schools were run by Windle International, Kenya.

## 3.2 RELEVANCE OF MY IDENTITY TO THE RESEARCH

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I studied in primary and secondary schools in Uganda. During the time I was in school, I could remember students getting corporal punishment for coming late and other issues in primary schools. I studied in different primary schools and I saw all of them practising corporal punishment. When I joined a boarding school for secondary school (Form 1-4), I did not see any student who was given corporal punishment. Of course, there were secondary schools where students were only students during the day. I remember visiting some of those students and I viewed how their schools were operated in relation to mine. None of these schools practised corporal punishment. Part of the reason is that students in secondary schools are traditionally seen to be entering adulthood, where they are prepared to join the workforce of tomorrow. As a result, secondary schools are given the responsibility to introduce students to good citizenship and make them proud to have secondary education.

I agree with Nyerere (1967) who argued that education within any system is meant to transfer knowledge and wisdom from one age group to the other. That means the younger generation should be prepared as future members of our society, where they will participate to maintain and develop it in explicit and implicit ways.

As for refugee students who learn in a camp setting apart from the general population, the implicit curriculum should be very ideal, because refugee students have had different volatile situations that brought them to the camps. That raises a bigger question:



**How should the school environment respond to the traumatic background experiences of refugee children?**

This question has received significant attention by scholars and educators in the context of resettled refugee children in Canada and beyond (see for example Stewart 2011; Tweedie et al. 2017; Walker and Zuberi 2019), but has not been studied in detail in a camp setting. Although this question is outside of the scope of this study,

**my research topic lends itself to a bigger discussion that should address issues which hamper a progressive approach to building a more prosperous system of education in encampments.**

Many humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR in Dadaab, have taught me to think critically about what education means to the refugees, for the refugees and by the refugees. It has awakened a thought about why refugee education in encampment is not coherent with the global development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals or the current Sustainable Development Goals that end in the year 2030.

Generally humanitarian organizations do not consider the importance of implementing such development goals in encampment, or if they do, it is because a donor partner wants that goal to be implemented in the camp.

### 3.3 INTERVIEWING

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I used semi-structured interviewing in this research with the four participants. Participants provided tangible details of how they went through corporal punishment in school, and how it should be addressed. The interview structure enhanced very successful conversations, in which I could probe the participants to give more information in order to enrich the data collection. I was touched by the narrations of the interviewees as they all had different emotional experiences on how their bodies were inflicted with severe pain. I was particularly impressed with how all of them could think of possible solutions to corporal punishment. I used common names as pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

As a past teacher in refugee schools, I was able to understand very well the experiences of the participants. I have stayed in Dadaab for 25 years now and the participants took me as one of them – another refugee. My position in this research was more of a participatory surveyor of how corporal punishment affect us as refugees.

I stood in the position of opposing corporal punishment, not as a punishment for disciplinary measure, but rather as a mean of inflicting and sustaining violence among the refugees.

Since refugee-ness is supposedly temporary, children who are punished in that way will eventually return to their countries of origin or be resettled in a third country and continue to practise corporal punishment as a way of discipline, continuing the cycle.

### 3.4. EXPERIENCES OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

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A summary of the participants and their details of corporal punishment are offered bellow.

**Abdi**



Abdi is a Somali refugee in his early thirties who escaped from Somalia as a child. He did all his studies including primary, secondary and university at the Dadaab refugee complex and currently holds a Master's degree in education. He experienced corporal punishment for the first time in 2001, while in primary school in Standard 7, because a male teacher arrived in the classroom ahead of him, which the teacher interpreted to mean he was late.

**Abdi went through a traumatic and violent experience when, with the use of excessive force, he was laid down and beaten in the scorching sun, where he sustained a broken finger and was unable to walk.**

At the end of the beating, he was carried by fellow students and taken by the agency vehicle to the hospital for treatment. On another occasion in secondary school, Abdi received over 30 slashes of stick on his buttocks for failing to memorize content exactly as it was written in the book. He used his mother tongue to replace a word that he could not immediately remember.

The teacher, who was not familiar with Abdi's vernacular, mistook what he had said for misbehaviour when the whole class laughed because of the use of that one word. Not even the school principal could believe his side of the story. He was taken to the hospital unconscious, where his condition stabilized on receiving treatment. He stayed for three weeks out of school and decided at the time to give up learning all together (though he later returned to education and is now a holder of a Master's of Education).

### Juma



Juma is a Somali man in his mid-twenties who completed his secondary education in 2018. At the time of the study, he was a prominent youth leader. He remembers receiving corporal punishment in primary school in 2014, in class 6, when he and other students arrived at school late. That day he also fought with another student and left school for three days. When he returned to school, teachers beat him up so hard he even failed to cry. He felt very bitter, left the school and decided not to go back. After four days when his parents talked to him, he went back reluctantly.

Following that incident, he was not beaten again in primary school. He became a student leader in class 7. In his second year of secondary school, he was beaten because he didn't like Kiswahili, never copied class notes and did not do any exercises or assignments.

**One day, the subject teacher, a trained national teacher and the deputy principal, identified him as such, took him to the staffroom, gave him corporal punishment on the buttocks with a big stick, and then gave him a task to dig the rubbish pit. When done with the pit, the teacher took him to water many trees and later, he was taken to the science laboratory to clean it.**

The whole day he was in school working and could not be allowed to go for lunch; he was only released to go home in the evening.

### Amina



Amina is a female Somali teacher in a primary school. She is in her late twenties and is currently pursuing a Certificate in Educational Studies at York University. When in Form 4, a female teacher from her school punished her severely. She became unconscious and was she taken by fellow students to the hospital and then home. Her tiny hand received 6 strokes. She was punished for acting as the class representative and expressed objection to the school proposal to collect money from students to initiate a feeding program. After the beating, she considered dropping out of school, thus ending her education.

She had to be counseled and advised to go back and complete her year of education in secondary school. Now as a teacher and an administrator, she still recalls how that female teacher punished her.

## Tom



Tom is a South Sudanese refugee in his early twenties and at the time of the interview in 2020, he was in Form 2. His experience of corporal punishment was in Form 1 when he arrived in school late on the day of examinations. The teacher on duty confined all late comers together in one group. As each student arrived, he or she would be beaten and sent to wait with the others in the group. After receiving punishment, Tom stepped aside from the group to talk with another student who was not late.

**The teacher came and started to just beat him without saying anything. He tried to run but the teacher continued beating him. He was slapped at the back of the neck which pained him seriously. When he stabilized, he then struggled and caught the teacher's hands to avoid more punishment. All the teachers on duty ganged up, beat him and he was suspended from school for 14 days.**

When he returned to school with his parent, he was again given punishment to cut trees and clear an area of the school compound.



## 4. DISCUSSION

Schools in the Dadaab Refugee Complex started immediately after the refugees were encamped here. There was a feeling that the civil war in Somalia, that caused many of them to flee to Kenya would end quickly and it would not take long before things would return normal. With that speculation, the education system was geared towards preparing students to go back to their countries of origin, primarily Somalia. UNICEF provided educational materials that met the Somali curriculum requirements in the Dadaab camps. The Somali curriculum lasted from 1992 to 1997, after which teaching refugee students shifted to the Kenyan curriculum. This research study investigated the use of corporal punishment after the Dadaab camps came under the Kenya National Education system.

Broadly, the study covers a period of about twenty years, which is the period that the participants were going through primary and secondary schooling. From the interviews conducted, the participants narrated their experiences during the different times that corporal punishment affected their lives.

Three of the four participants stated that they experienced corporal punishment at both primary and secondary school.

One only remembered a secondary school experience. Abdi is one of the three participants who experienced corporal punishment at primary school in 2001, when the Kenyan curriculum was barely four years old. When he started secondary school, he again encountered severe corporal punishment from another refugee teacher, in 2003. All the slashings on the buttocks were done while he was lain down on the ground. Abdi assigns this teacher treatment to lack of appropriate teacher training and care. He stated:

“

I expect to be my second parent [...] I don't expect him to punish me like one of his enemies [...] To keep the learner in a fearful environment, do you expect that I can learn anything? You think I will be a better person in my community? I will do the same on learners tomorrow in my class. - **Abdi**

”

When students come to school, they expect an alternative environment to home, where they live in a healthy relationship with their peers and teachers. Through enhanced social interactions in schools, children develop cognitively, learn from one another and the environment. Here they are motivated and teachers can verbally discipline the learners by explaining issues and giving them reasons why they are wrong. This approach can stimulate learners to adjust in the most appropriate way without being demoralized from learning.

Juma encountered corporal punishment in primary school in 2014. He recalled a day he arrived late at school and fought with a fellow learner. That was when he was in standard 6. When teachers wanted to punish him for the offence of peer fighting, he fled back home and stayed away from school for three days. The next time he returned to school he arrived late and the teachers immediately recognized him. They all rushed to him and beat him up. He could still recall how he was seriously beaten and how he had wanted to cry but could not. That was a memorable incident which was never again repeated when he became a school head boy in standard seven, in the same school. Juma stated that his teachers treated him this way because they believe that corporal punishment is the only way of discipline in school, and they give excessive punishment disproportional to the mistake a student has done.

At secondary school, he again experienced yet another severe form of corporal punishment. In Form 2, Juma didn't like Kiswahili and could not do any activity connected to Kiswahili. When the subject teacher found out, he took him to the staffroom and beat him seriously on the buttocks with a big stick, forced him to dig a hole for burning rubbish and water trees, and finally clean and arrange the science laboratory. As he worked in the school the entire day, he was not permitted to go for lunch and was only released to go home in the evening. The teacher was a trained Kenyan national who was also the school's deputy principal. Similar to his primary school beating, Juma vividly remembered the pain he felt because of this kind of punishment. He stated:

“

Corporal punishment is not something that can change students positively. There are ways in which teachers can use to approach their students. When they do a mistake, it does not mean the students should be punished. What I could have said is, teachers should not beat their students, but they could advise. - Juma

”



What Juma argued was how teachers can build a cordial relationship with their learners.



**Most refugee learners have come from a cultural background where the school should play a great role in**

**shaping them to be responsible individuals. The future lies in their hands so positive transformation of their lives means a lot.**

Amina was a female participant who could not remember specific personal incidents of corporal punishment at primary school. However, she vividly remembered an incident that happened when she was in form 4. She narrated what occurred when a female teacher beat her tiny hand with strong strokes until she collapsed. According to her, the excessive corporal punishment was not only connected with her lateness, rather, it was also because she was a part of the group of students in Form 4 who went and met with their camp chairlady to interrupt the ongoing process of collecting money from students for a feeding program by the school management. On the day she was punished, it was in the afternoon when she arrived at school late and had not eaten lunch.

The teacher on duty would not let her change one hand for the other. She insisted on beating only one. The severe beating and pain made her collapse and it was her fellow students who hired a taxi to take her to the hospital and home.

She decided that would mark the end of her education. Those close to her came and talked to her to reverse her decision to go back to school and complete her education, since that year was her final year in secondary school. She yielded to the advice and completed her studies. She noted that during her school days, most teachers in secondary schools were trained Kenyan teachers, who were registered by the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC). TSC is the mandated body that contracts, hires and fires teachers in Kenya in line with the education policies. The teacher who punished her was one of those female Kenyan teachers contracted to serve refugee students.

Tom is a South Sudanese student who did not experience corporal punishment in primary school. He experienced corporal punishment in 2019, when in Form 1. He arrived late in the morning, entered the school gate and was directed to join a group of late comers, standing in the sun. He went a distance from the group and stood under a tree when one of his friends came and started talking with him. On that day, examinations were also going on. The teacher on duty approached him and started beating him continuously.

The teacher did not only beat him but slapped him seriously at the back of the neck and during the interview, he said he could still feel the pain. He almost fell down, however, on stabilizing himself, he got hold of the teacher's two hands so that he could not be beaten like that.

To him, he did not deserve all that beating from the teacher because he only made a small mistake: stepping aside and talking with his fellow peer. When the other teachers on duty saw how their colleague was held by Tom, they all came and started punishing him extremely. He claimed that it was:

“

not just a beating but a severe revenge-like punishment that he received. - Tom

”

The school administrators gave him two weeks suspension from school and asked that he report with his parent on the day he would be returning to school. When he reported back after those two weeks, he was given yet another five slashes on the buttocks, slapped by the deputy principal and was assigned to cut and clear a bushy area of the school compound. Tom narrated how his experiences on that day were very embarrassing and disappointing.

However, when compared to other beatings he witnessed, his own beating appeared small and simple. He narrated a day when he witnessed the treatment of one of the South Sudanese male students who had been beaten in the hand and was holding it. Another teacher came and saw this one student standing outside holding his pained hand. The teacher inquired why the student was outside. He told the teacher how he was beaten and was standing outside because of the pain.

The inquisitive teacher disagreed and stated that the student was outside because he wanted to fight with a teacher. They took the student to the staffroom, beat him seriously and blood came from his back. When this incident happened, Tom's parent was also in the school. He asked the parent whether the kind of punishment she saw administered on them was fair.



**The parent got annoyed and started arguing with the deputy principal, accusing them of beating students as**

**if they were criminals who had been taken to the Police Station.**

It was not the kind of punishment a parent expected from teachers in school. Still, that student was given a week out of school and was told to report back with his parent.

## 4.1 SCHOOL IS A PRISON; DISCIPLINE AT HOME IS FOR GROWTH

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All the four participants said the kind of punishment they received from school is very different from that at home. They all commented that discipline at home is necessary and healthy, where parents use it only for correction purposes on their children. Juma said that when at home, his parents would only shout at him, to stop messing up things. And when he continued, the parents would not take a big stick or give him very hard and tiring work as punishment. They would take a small stick and spank him with in a “good” way that would not make him think of running away from home. Parents do not punish their children to run and leave their homes.



HOME

VS



SCHOOL

Tom argued that what he has seen parents do when their sons and daughters do something wrong is to give them advice. That was what he knew. However, he said that when the child was too young to take advice or understand instructions, parents normally take small sticks to spank them so that they understand that what they were doing was wrong and should not be repeated. You spank a child and at the same time tell the child what the mistake is and how to avoid it.

Amina said the punishment parents give to their children from home is very different from that at school. At school, a girl child is beaten in the hands, ten strokes on one hand and ten strokes on the other hand. At home, if you are female, your parent may just slap or pinch you. At times, the mother may take a stick and gives you two or three canes. The difference is that teachers punish students in schools seriously.

Abdi also stated that the punishment at school is different from that at home.

**Parents punish children to correct them so that they follow the right way of life, by doing the right thing at the right time. The punishment from the teacher is creating grudges between the teacher and the student, where the teacher is viewed as very cruel and unkind, inflicting a very painful and unforgettable punishment on the body of a student.**

## 4.2 WITNESSING PEERS GO THROUGH CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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Three participants remember how their peers went through corporal punishment. Their stories were comparable narrations to their individual experience. They shared how bad they felt when their peers were beaten. Abdi saw many of his peers go through corporal punishment. He shared the instance he claimed was most outstanding. It was that of a girl who came late on a Monday assembly in the parade.

The teacher on duty was a feared man. He used force to bring that student in front of the parade, where there was a suggestion that the female student should lie down and be slashed on the buttocks. This is a culturally unacceptable way of beating female students in this Somali-dominated society. Girls in school can only be corporally punished by caning their open hands. So, the headteacher, who was also in the parade, refuted that suggestion, knowing that it would spark animosity with the refugee community as a whole. The student was then beaten seriously in the hand. She was injured, blood came out from her fingers and she had to be taken to the hospital for treatment. That girl dropped out of school and was married.

Juma remembered the punishment of one of his fellow students who was in Form 2. That student did not frequently attend school. So, one day the principal removed him from the classroom when he had come to school. He was taken to the office. The student went back to class when he was crying. He opened his shirt and showed the other students in the class his body so that they could see how he was injured. The principal had used a big stick and excessive force to punish him. He was bleeding and so he immediately left and went home. One of his parents came that very day to school to inquire why the son was badly beaten. The school administration and that parent exchanged words that stirred up the whole school. If they had continued, the school would have gone on strike. Students were empathetic with the condition of that student.

**That student never came back to school again [...]. He is now on drugs and completely left school because of corporal punishment. This example shows that corporal punishment has long-term and not just short-term consequences for students, contrary to the common paradigm of using it to attain immediate effects in diverting bad behaviours.**

Tom recalled an incident of a South Sudanese student who was beaten in the hand and came standing outside the classroom holding his hand. It was a sad memory because it coincided with the day he was punished as well. He felt it was a very unfair treatment of a student, subjecting students to the kind of punishment that only thieves and donkeys deserve.

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Teachers are said to have turned the school punishment to resemble that of the police. They gang up against students as if students are criminals and beat as if to kill them. - Tom

”

That student was punished beyond the required limit and blood came from his back. The school principal could not even come to the defense of the student. When the student tried to explain that he was unfairly punished he was given a letter of seven days suspension, after which he would report with the parent. Finally, Amina claimed that punishment has always been in schools but did not have any examples she specifically remembered at the time of the interview.

### 4.3 REFLECTING ON PARTICIPANTS' PUNISHMENT

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The school is an institution of learning, where children and teachers can interact in a structured way through organized curricula to deliver education to learners. According to Eisner (2002), there are three types of curricula that the school offers. The first is explicit curriculum whereby teachers prepare and plan to deliver the contents of their subjects or lessons. In explicit curriculum, the school plants into the students the ability to assess and initiate things independently during and after school. At the same time, the school offers the implicit curriculum to foster compliant behavior. Teachers reward students continuously in their time in school so that they acquire a certain type of behavior. It is in this type of curriculum, the implicit curriculum, or hidden curriculum, reward and (corporal) punishment are found.

In Dadaab refugee complex, the students' narrations reveal the implications of the use of punishment in primary and secondary schools, but there was no evidence of rewards. The school as an institution wields power over the learners, by exercising what the participants described as slashing students seriously, beating them like thieves or donkeys. All the phrases that participants used to demonstrate the pleasure that teachers in refugee schools take in executing punishment are problematic. When asked if they thought corporal punishment is fair, three of the participants described corporal punishment in schools as never fair. Only one said corporal punishment is fair if it is administered correctly.

Abdi stated that corporal punishment is never fair. He said many people believe teachers are the second parents to students in school. He would never expect a teacher to punish him inappropriately and for him, he hoped that the teacher would one day apologize for the wrong done to him as a student. However, the teacher who punished him extremely kept on tormenting him by maliciously reminding him of the punishment he inflicted on him then. He would always say, "have you forgotten that one? I am still looking for you seriously for next time. So, you will get a thorough punishment."

**To Abdi, the teacher's threats scared him and he never felt free in school. He did not expect the teacher to be an enemy. He wanted a teacher to be motivating, exemplary, kind, and caring, as well as to treat him as his own child. Abdi claimed that by creating a fearful school environment for the students, the teacher is depriving learners of the right space for learning.**

As a student, he was expected to follow what the teacher does in school. Next time he would become a teacher, he would obviously create violence as well in the school.

Juma said such punishment wasn't fair. He said beating students extremely never makes them disciplined. It cannot change their minds positively. To him,

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when a student makes a mistake, the best way is for a teacher to take the student somewhere, sit with the student and advise. - Tom

”

That is the only way to change students positively, instead of taking them to the staffroom to beat them. Like Abdi, he stated that teachers should play parental roles when children are in school.

According to Amina, the collection of many sticks to punish students is unfair. It makes students very vulnerable due to severe punishment in schools. As a teacher, at times she would ask herself why teachers punish learners. She would sit and think of why an alternative system of punishment cannot be used. Corporal punishment still continues. However, it is not like it was before, in part due to training teachers on how to guide and counsel learners before giving them punishment.

Of the four participants, Tom is the only one who said that punishment is good. He argued that if a student is given appropriate corporal punishment, he or she can refrain from the mischief and will not repeat it.

Comparatively, Tom claimed the punishment he received in school was fairer in comparison to that of the South Sudanese boy who was badly beaten by teachers like a thief and a donkey, just because he was holding the paining hand. Abdi said people should come up with new and alternative ways of giving punishment to learners. In this way, if students are engaged,

**if they are respected based on the ideas they contribute and their cultural background, then school would be a very good place for them.**



Teachers should be taken to various teaching institutions and trained on how to discipline students and how to create a school or a class that is beautiful, caring, kind, and inclusive for both teachers and students. Teachers can engage learners positively and put aside corporal punishment. Subjecting a child all the time to a fearful environment is a punishment to the mind of a child.

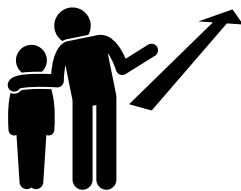
Some students drop out of school when corporal punishment is used as the means of discipline. Abdi saw students who dropped out because they feared teachers who performed corporal punishment. Eventually, these students' lives are destroyed and they become addicted to drugs, involved in drug dealing, or homeless. In the end, Abdi recommended following the example of a teacher who went to his home when he was severely beaten in school and had decided never again to go to school. According to him, the teacher was highly qualified to work as a teacher and to think through meaningful ways of disciplining students.



He had never even seen this teacher talk to learners in a bad way. Consequently, many learners including Abdi loved the teacher more than anybody else, sometimes even more than their parents. Abdi suggested the possibility that some teachers involved in corporal punishment could be mentored by such a teacher, in order to get training on behavioural change. Abdi's suggestion is very viable that teachers could be trained through mentorship by colleagues in a pursuit to end corporal punishment in school.

According to Amina, corporal punishment can be replaced. Teachers can give learners counseling, tell them to clean the school compound, or do activities that eventually lead them to stop from repeating the same mistake again and again. Punishing students through corporal punishment can easily create a negative attitude and feeling towards education. As a teacher and an administrator in the school, she has seen teachers punish learners extremely through corporal punishment and told them to refrain from it.

**She advises teachers to sit down with their learners, ask them about their actions in order to identify the problems, then give them guidance and counseling, rather than corporal punishment.**



In case counseling is challenging, and the culprit is repeating the same mistake, the teacher should look for another form of punishment.

To Amina, learners should be treated in a fair and humanitarian way. However, despite her beliefs, Amina said she still carries sticks in school because learners in Kenya only fear sticks. If a teacher does not carry one, students do not seriously consider her as a teacher. Amina insisted that if she didn't carry a stick, then it meant she was not a teacher. Thus, in addition to its use to punish, the stick is now a powerful symbol of teacher identity. Amina stated that she does not punish the way other teachers do because she still remembers what that teacher did to her and she cannot punish students like that.

Juma also said teachers can use other approaches, such as giving students advice instead of beating them. He cited his case, where the Kiswahili teacher punished him badly until he hated him. Whenever that teacher came to class, Juma, would move out and did not attend his lesson again after the beating. He argued that he could do better in that subject if the teacher took him aside, told him the importance of the subject and explained how best to tackle it. The teacher should have brought him closer as a student and molded him to understand and pass Kiswahili. Tom said that should he become a teacher, if he was on duty at the gate waiting for late comers, or involved with those who did not do the class work, or solving other petty issues within the school, he would just advise students and punish in an appropriate way according to what they all deserve.

## 4.4 THE GENDER IMPLICATIONS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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Juma explained that it is not only boys who suffer from corporal punishment. Girls also suffer as there are female teachers who see to it that girls are given corporal punishment, such as the way Amina was extremely punished on one hand. Girls and boys are not the same in the Somali community, where men dominate women, and one of the means of avoiding early marriage is for the reason that a girl is “held up” in school. When Amina was badly punished and had decided to end her studies, if she had a father, he would have immediately proposed a man for her to marry.

**Thus, according to Juma, after getting corporal punishment and because of the hard life in the school, some girls decide to get married. They see how unfairly teachers treat them and this is one of the prevailing forces that pushes them towards early marriage.**

Girls who have the ambition to study, in most cases, have their own visions. Those are the things that motivate them to strive to study hard for a better life in future. But when they see how teachers treat them badly in school, the only option they have is to get married. That means the school no longer offers them the conducive environment through which their previous ambition is fulfilled.

When girls marry, it means they will stay at their homes and will not be treated very badly as in school. So, girls decide to get married because they will have their own homes, and by staying with their husbands they have the “freedom” to create a life better than school life. According to Tom, the punishment of girls in the Dadaab schools is different from that of the boys because of the cultural influence of the Somali community. Abdi also commented on this culture and referred to the day a girl arrived late on the parade and the principal refused for her to be beaten on the buttocks because it would spark issues of breaking the cultural norms of punishing a girl child.



## 5. CONCLUSION

Students have found themselves very desperate and helpless in the hands of educators who gang up to perform acts of injustice. One of the participants, Tom, argued like Foucault (1995) that punishments should be adjusted and implemented in a relational way to the mistake a learner has committed. He claimed that the punishment that his teacher gave him was good enough to refrain him from repeating it again. He felt it unbearable for the continuous beating that the teacher gave him, including slapping at the back of the neck that was still paining at the time of the interview. Oteri and Oteri said that “corporal punishment is a form of physical punishment that is practiced deliberately to cause pain as retribution for an offence, or to control or reform an offender, or to discourage unacceptable and offensive behaviours” (2018: 125). That is what the participants explained their parents give them when they do something wrong at home. Oteri and Oteri distinguish between corporal punishment and physical abuse, saying that “behaviours that risk injury are considered physical abuse” (2018: 125). All the participants interviewed, including their peers, were physically abused in school.

The corporal punishment inflicted on students in Dadaab schools does not adhere to any standards and students are beaten at will according to the emotion of the teachers.

Take the example of Juma’s classmate who came back to the classroom crying with his back bleeding and that of the South Sudanese student who was found holding his hand outside the classroom, or Amina who fainted when beaten, or Abdi who had to be carried to the hospital when he was given 29 slashes on the buttocks. Is there no one who can talk on their behalf, so that things are corrected? Amina, a female school administrator, claimed that in her school, if a teacher does not carry a stick, children will not consider that person to be a teacher. That means that she too must carry a stick regardless of her beliefs. And according to Duale, Leomoi, Aden, Oyat, Dagane and Abikar (2019), the stick is known as assistant teacher. That is because formal education in Africa was mostly introduced by missionaries who interpreted the use of corporal punishment as morally right in accordance with their religious beliefs (Greydanus et al. 2003).

Researchers like Nwosu, Nwasor and Ndbuisi (2013) argued that parents and teachers support the use of corporal punishment on students because its effect is immediate compliance. They claim that it compels students to respect their teachers. This study contradicts that assertion, because all the students showed hatred and fear towards the teachers. Even Tom who claimed that it was okay for him to have been punished, stated that he had to accept rather than respect the teacher’s actions because there was something he wanted from the teacher, which is knowledge. He said if it was not for that, he would have beaten the teacher in return.

As a young man, Tom sees education as something that he must gain regardless of bodily harm. But for those who were beaten when they were young – Abdi, Juma and Amina – corporal punishment created a very unfriendly relationship with teachers. Accordingly, Greydanus et al. (2003) argued that the use of corporal punishment has a very bad effect on the learners, who leave school with an appreciation of violence as an acceptable norm in the society, encouraging them to also be violent with their children and other members of the community. Abdi confirmed this argument by saying:

“if the teacher punishes a learner this way, he shows her or him a wrong way of handling a learner in future. To keep the learner in a fearful environment, do you expect them to learn anything? Do you think they will be a better people in their community? They will do the same on learners tomorrow in their classrooms. That means they will also create violence in schools as future teachers.”

Oteri and Oteri found that “when corporal punishment decreases participants in [the] study report increase academic performance” (2018: 125). Danish and Iqbal in their research in educational psychology, found that the “comparison between corporal punishment and psychological treatment shows that the impact of corporal punishment is associated with impairment of psychology of the children and self-negation” (2016: 11).

**In a refugee context, corporal punishment is more scarring because of the precarious situation that created encampment.**

It is believed that when children in encampment are in schools, the fragile nature of their environment can be censored, and their absenteeism monitored by the school authority. Is that applicable in the Dadaab case? Only Tom reported a willingness to go back to school to learn after corporal punishment and he is South Sudanese. The other three participants never wanted to go back to school after corporal punishment and they are Somali. Dadaab is just less than a hundred kilometres from the border with Somalia, a country that has experienced civil war since 1991. Creating an aggressive school environment automatically triggers the memories that sent the learners away from their countries of origin. As a result, students who drop out from school will be forced to go back and some may eventually end up with the insurgents. Those who were able to complete their studies well have gone back to their countries to assist in national development.

Participants narrated the most difficult encounters of corporal punishment they endured during their years of schooling. This violence in learning institutions contradicts efforts by the international community aimed at promoting the delivery of quality education for refugee learners. This violence raises the question: how is quality education implemented in a hostile environment such as that narrated by the student participants in Dadaab? Even in such frightening conditions, data from my study indicates that the participants would still pursue their education, and at the time of the interviews, they saw themselves as the possible change makers.

From the research study, I was able to get answers to some of the pertinent issues including why corporal punishment occurs in schools in the refugee camps. The participants cited late coming as the most common phenomenon that leads to corporal punishment. There are also cases of absenteeism, fighting among students, refusing to do class assignments and homework, copying lesson notes, and refusing to obey teachers' orders, like staying in one place or getting out of class without permission. There is no specific rule put in place for the number of strokes for every offence a student commits. As a result, teachers use their instincts or past experiences as models of how to administer corporal punishment. The excessive force applied in beating students has created a negative attitude towards learning.

**This study found that students who experience severe corporal punishment at school leave learning completely unless advised by parents, peers, and sometimes teachers to return to school in order to learn.**

Some students who ended in the company of people in the community who sympathized with them and offered other life options out of school, do not return to such a brutalizing environment.

In my research study, girls were said to be more affected than boys. The reason is that, in the Somali community, where forced and early marriages are practiced, the school could be the only sanctuary for girls to escape challenging and patriarchal cultural practices. With the harsh environment in school, where girls are severely beaten, they cannot leave school and stay at home without raising the concern of the parents and relatives to marry them. Girls who receive corporal punishment may resort to looking for a boyfriend with whom to run away and get married in order to avoid being given for marriage to someone with whom they are not familiar. This situation could be contained if school is a girl-friendly space, created to allow girls to accomplish their education dreams. My research identified that corporal punishment in Dadaab refugee camps is done differently across gender: the male students are mostly lashed on the buttocks, and the females are spanked on the hands. This study has not been able to uncover the reasons behind this practice, partly because teachers who use the corporal punishment were not interviewed. In order to understand better female dropout from school due to corporal punishment, future studies are needed to engage with several females who attended school in the refugee camps. Only one female participant was interviewed, even though the other three participants also noted that some of the female students go through stressful corporal punishment.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporal punishment is a serious issue in refugee schools that negatively impacts students, with short-term impacts like injuries and long-term impacts like dropping out of school. This research study is intended to add knowledge into the academic world about how corporal punishment is conducted in refugee secondary schools and its impacts on the learners. The silence about what has been happening for years should be broken. There are a lot of things that are not fully understood about corporal punishment in refugee contexts. The study contributes to further research on positive, effective and sustainable refugee education, not only in Dadaab, but also in other places where people have been forcefully displaced from their homes. I hope those studies will influence policies towards punishment and discipline of refugee and displaced students, making access to education in these places safe and friendly for students and allowing a school culture in which teachers and students learn from one another in a mutually friendly environment. Based on this study, I propose the following recommendations:



**1. Teacher training:** Training teachers who teach refugees on positive discipline is a very good option in mitigating and eventually ending corporal punishment. The research study done in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, by Mendenhall et al. (2020) entitled “Teachers as agents of change: positive discipline for inclusive classrooms in Kakuma refugee camp” fully supports this recommendation. As part of teacher training, it is very important to let teachers know about all the issues related to development goals and human rights. Currently, we have the Sustainable Development Goals and it may be surprising to find out that most teachers do not know or are not familiar with this agenda.



**2. Anti-violence policies:** Putting in place policies that deter the use of corporal punishment requires the involvement of all the education stakeholders. The involvement of parents plays a very crucial role in sourcing for lasting solutions. The majority of parents use corporal punishment and they encourage teachers to use it on their children, without knowing its long-term effects on their children, without knowing its long-term effects on their children. Parents also deserve to be trained on the use of positive discipline at home. Mitigating and stopping the use of corporal punishment as a whole may require legal action on the perpetrators and the use of CCTV cameras in schools to identify those who practice it, without victimizing the students for reporting the teachers to authority.



**3. Future research:** There is a need for further investigation on how corporal punishment impacts the general academic performance of refugee students. One of the participants narrated how he lived in fear and could not concentrate in his studies because the teacher who had punished him kept reminding him of his punishment and the desire to punish him in the future. What is the relationship of the level of corporal punishment with age, ethnicity, or country of origin? Finally, how could students perform in school if there was no corporal punishment?

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