

BULLYING among children remains one of the most persistent challenges in schools today. Victims often suffer physical and emotional trauma, with long-term consequences that can extend into adulthood. But how we respond to children who bully, especially when our methods mirror the harm they inflict, deserves equal scrutiny.

In many Asian societies, corporal punishment has long been embedded in traditional child-rearing practices. Caning, spanking, or other forms of physical discipline were historically seen as tools to instil respect, obedience, and moral character. These practices were often justified by cultural values emphasising shame, hierarchy, and deference to authority. However, what tradition once normalised is now being critically re-evaluated.

Paediatricians across Asia and globally are increasingly vocal in their opposition to corporal punishment. The Malaysian Paediatric Association (MPA) rec-

Changing the narrative on bullying and discipline



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ommends banning such practices in both schools and homes. Our stance is grounded not only in ethical concerns but also in robust scientific evidence. Research consistently shows that corporal punishment does not reduce bullying behaviour, in fact, it may exacerbate it.

Studies have found that physi-

cal punishment impairs moral internalisation and increases aggression, antisocial behaviour, and emotional instability. Children who are punished harshly may not understand why their behaviour is wrong; instead, they learn to fear authority or replicate violence as a means of control. Longitudinal data also

link corporal punishment to poorer academic outcomes, strained family relationships, and increased risk of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Moreover, the effectiveness of corporal punishment is undermined by its short-term impact. While it may temporarily suppress undesirable behaviour, it fails to foster empathy, self-regulation, or long-term behavioural change. As the American Psychological Association notes, "Children do not need pain to learn", they need guidance, consistency, and emotional safety.

We must shift our focus from punishment to support. Positive reinforcement, open communication, and education are far more effective in promoting meaningful behaviour change. It is essential to understand the root causes of bullying, whether environmental, familial, or social, and address

them with compassion and evidence-based strategies.

When we challenge outdated norms and embrace non-violent discipline, we create safer, more nurturing environments for all children. Our goal should be to cultivate compassion, respect, and resilience, not fear. Choosing kindness over cruelty is a moral imperative and a public health priority.

The MPA urges parents and educators to adopt constructive, culturally sensitive alternatives to corporal punishment. Let us honour our tradition by evolving it toward practices that protect and uplift our children.

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