

## **Caning – Official child abuse in schools**

*My daughter in Kindergarten has just arrived from school with bruises on her arm and back. Her offence was she went to drop a piece of paper in the dustbin without seeking the teacher's permission so the teacher caned her.*

*I have personally spoken to this lady teacher and asked her not to cane our daughter because our family does not believe that school children be disciplined by spanking; better put caning. We believe that it sends children the wrong message that hitting people is a way to solve problems; for children learn from the adult's behaviour.*

*We made her aware that we know that our child will make mistakes as do all learning and growing children. For we learn from our own mistakes. When that happens, we hope she will help our child learn without the use of violence what appropriate behaviour is and how to act more appropriately in the future. We made her aware that if she is having problem with our child, she should not hesitate to contact us and we will make every effort to come to the school to help her.*

*We are not in any way trying to dictate to her, for we are only trying to protect our child and prevent ourselves from being embarrassed by our child in the future, should she ask us why we sent her to such a place and why no one bothered to do anything about it knowing that corporal punishment has been found to have serious physical, social, sexual, emotional and psychological risks for all children particularly on the developing brain.*

*Unfortunately, like most teachers, it seems that this lady teacher cannot manage these little children without the cane. First, because she was a victim herself as a child and a student; children who have been recipients of violence throughout their childhood become dispensers of it as soon as they are able; it is her turn to use it. Second because the school has no clear policy on the use of the cane and therefore, teachers continue to use it indiscriminately.*

*What is unfortunate is that throughout my training as a teacher, no tutor ever taught me how to use the cane in caning a child; neither have I ever met any tutor who has told me that it was part of his syllabus or curriculum, nor has any inspector ever inspected the cane they use or the velocity of their whip and the effect on their students.*

*One wonders why it is still in use even when the colonial master who introduced it to us with the formal education, went back and reformed his system and stopped it. For how long are we going to expose our children to this violence and pretend that it is alright when we know very well that it is not?*

*The argument that the use of corporal punishment in school has declined is no good news since defenceless children are still been caned. Sadly, in Ghana today, the geographical location of a child and the parents' financial statues determine how one is legally abused since corporal punishment is more prevalent in our rural areas and public schools.*

*In these days, when society is appalled at children settling grievances with guns and athletes with fists, when parents who beat children can face criminal charges, professional educators are allowed to hit the buttocks of defenceless children and even that of mature ladies with a stick as a disciplinary tool.*

*Not only is it legalise child abuse, it's a message schools should not deliver. Children are taught by the example of authority-wielding adults, that violence is an acceptable response to inappropriate behaviour. Well, it is not acceptable, and signs exist that it*

is on the way out of our educational system as more and more parents are getting aware of its effects on their children.

Paddling proponents argue that it deters violent behaviour. Research shows the opposite. If it were effective, schools that use the cane the most should have been the best schools in this country and children who are caned the most the best behaved. It is also the opposite.

I strongly believe that corporal punishment does not prevent misbehaviour, if it does, educators and parents would not be hitting kids multiple times for the same offence. The more children are hit, the more likely they are to be aggressive, violent and learn to tell lies.

If it were also true, all teacher training colleges in Ghana and all universities training prospective teachers would have included the use of the cane in their curriculum. School inspectors would have been inspecting the cane and award the best teachers in its use.

Just this afternoon, I met another girl from school who had been bruised by a teacher. Her offence was that she was late for school and for her punishment she was to be caned on the buttocks against her will. In the process the cane landed on her hand leaving a big cut. One case of legal child abuse is one too many for us as a civilised society.

How would our children understand the message that they should not allow any man to touch their private parts which include their buttocks when we sanction male teachers doing so with impunity in the name of discipline?

No wonder these children are being sexually abused by some of their teachers and yet they do not report it. The state should be held responsible for this behaviour so long as it sanctions school corporal punishment in schools.

Student-teacher sexual relationships exist in some of our schools and parents need to be told the truth. Let us not pretend that this is not real. We need to equip our children to report without fear and shame such unscrupulous teachers and headteachers who are doing this.

Parents who cringe at violence on television and fear it on the streets should demand that their children are not officially exposed to it at school. If enough parents say so, school authorities and our legislators will respond. Parents have a right to demand that their children are protected while in school.

As the law stands now in our schools, we still sanction the use of the cane. What we need is to introduce explicit legislation to prohibit such corporal punishment of children. This law reform must be accompanied by comprehensive awareness-raising and public education, aimed at ensuring that all children enjoy their rights to protection.

So long as the law remains silent, in absence of explicit prohibition, parental corporal punishment will remain socially and legally approved and the Domestic Violence Law would become useless vis a vis child maltreatment at home.

Ghana was one of the countries that ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under this Convention, it is stated that all children have the same rights to have their needs supplied, no matter where they are in the world.

Article 9(1) also states that: States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s),

*legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.*

*What are we waiting for to enforce this law? How many more children are we waiting for to lose their eyes through the so called school discipline before we wake up to the fact that school caning is no longer necessary and that civilised societies are doing without it and are even doing better than we do in every field? Let us stop this classicism mentally and give equal protection to all children irrespective of their geographical locations and their parents' financial statuses.*

*I have personally heard a lot of people blaming the youth of today and have really wondered what the youth of today is doing differently than that of yesterday. I have also asked myself if the youth of today is not a product of that of yesterday. This has been a real bother to me until I came across a thought-provoking article from the book of JOHANN CHRISTOPH ARNOLD: ENDANGERED. This book can be downloaded freely from the net at: [www.bruderhorf.com](http://www.bruderhorf.com)*

*If you are also concerned about the violence in our institutions, homes and on our streets, then think about this child's reasoning and decide for yourself where the problem comes from and sit up as a parent and shoulder all your responsibilities and not push them to someone else.*

*In this book, Johann asked a pertinent question "what is it that today's children are rebelling against so vigorously, and why?" To Johann, the answer is simple- HYPOCRISY. To support it, she quoted an answer given by a student at Texas A & M who felt compelled to explain after the Columbine massacre, why things have "become so bad":*

*...Let me tell you this: these questions don't represent only me but a whole generation that is struggling to grow up and make sense of this world. People may label us "Generation Next," but we are more "Generation Why?"*

*Why did most of you lie when you made the vow of till death do us part? Why do you fool yourself into believing that divorce really is better for the kids in the long run? Why do so many of you divorced parents spend more time with your new boyfriend or girlfriend than with your own children?*

*Why did you ever fall victim to the notion that kids are just as well off being raised by a complete stranger at a day care centre than by their own mother or father? Why do you look down on parents who decide to quit work and stay home to raise their children?*

*Why do you allow us to spend unlimited amounts of time on the Internet but still are shocked about our knowledge of how to build bombs? Why are you so afraid to tell us 'no' sometimes?*

*Call us what you want to, but you will be surprised how we will fail to fit into your neat little category...Now is the time to reap what you have sown. You might not think so, but I can guarantee that Littleton will look like a drop in the bucket compared to what might occur when a neglected 'Generation Why' comes to power".*

*This young student has said it all. This is how our little ones see us. How consistent are we with our children? Do we teach them the rule of "do as I say, not as I do"? Or "do as I do and say"?*

*Wife battering was barbaric yet normal until it was legislated against, so is child battering. Caning is a barbaric act that accomplishes nothing and may end up costing us dearly in the long run. It should be stopped now.*