

Fighting Domestic Violence, Are we on the right path or Losing the Battle?

When lawmakers claim they want to address the problem of domestic violence, that is spousal battering, but remain silent about the high rate of violence across our educational system, one wonders if they can really be taken serious.

Educator violence, which is canning of school children by teachers, is not new with us and even most of our lawmakers might have experienced this in one way or the other at the hand of their educators or they might have had their education in countries where it has be banned. We must remember that, teachers who punish school boys by smacking them on their buttocks with a cane are preparing them to become abusive husbands. Similarly, battered girls are learning to become submissive wives.

When as parents, some of us are training our children to understand that no man has the right to touch them on their buttocks since that part of their body is also their private part and we have an educational system which believes otherwise and does the opposite to what we teach our children, how serious can they take us? We are constantly sending a mix message to our young ones and one wonders why, as a society we are so surprise about the increase in youth violence?

The double standard in our laws must be challenged in a law court for us to save our children. How would a child understand that it is wrong for a man to touch his or her buttocks without his or her consent when it is wrong at home but legal in our educational institutions and sadly, it is being done by male teachers?

As trained, certified experts, teachers represent a standard for the general community – a standard that is imprinted into the public mind beginning in the earliest years. Conveniently substituting the word "discipline" for "violence" doesn't change the substance of the matter; violence is violence even if we euphemistically decide to call it discipline.

When in school, a teacher can strike one's buttocks with whatever the teacher wills, but once not in school but working, one's boss has no right to do same even when one makes the same mistakes that would have attracted the smacking in school. What is the rationale behind this? Since we are concern about discipline, I believe the level of demand of discipline in our schools should be extended to our work places, and I bet we would have the most successful working environment and also unto our roads to save the life of innocent passengers and pedestrians.

Shamefully, even matured students of all ages in some of our schools are being smacked every day for minor mistakes as coming late to school or not understanding a lesson taught by a teacher. What a shame for a society that calls itself civilized?

How I wish we could at least make one's 18th birthday the magic moment for achieving equal

protection under the law against assault and battery at least to save married mothers and men who decide to further their education from the embarrassment they go through in the hands of teachers who at times could be their own children. Even though this might seem absurd, it might be a starting point since it is an interesting age and moment for all politicians.

Another child has lost one eye in Abor EP school in the Volta Region by the teacher's cane. For most people, it is an accident; but for that child and the parents, it would never be an accident and to that teacher too; if he has a conscience it will never be an accident as he will forever live to remember this.

Violence is violence irrespective of the victim or the perpetrator. If smacking one's spouse is violence and we successfully legislated against it, vis a vis the protest of most men who thought they could not live with their wives without hitting them, the same degree of urgency and reasoning should drive us to legislate against child battery and even mature young men and women both at home, in schools, in all training institutions and detention centres for young offenders.

Failure to educate the public on the effect of corporal punishment both on our children and the larger society is the result we are seeing today. In the first place, it takes away the human feeling from the child and hardens that child. After all, how are wild dogs trained or made? You starve them for some time and give them some beatings and there you go; so is the making of "wild human beings" and "less-human beings".

Today we are all complaining of the inhuman treatment of prisoners in our prisons and detention centers around the country, yet no one seems to care about what needs to be done about it. Why? Do we feel for those who are there? Do we see them as human beings who for one reason or the other found themselves there? It is only love that can heal this world, and as a nation we have a responsibility to do everything possible to demonstrate this love toward every individual in this country irrespective of age or geographical location, if not, our failure to protect our young ones will always hit us back in the face.

As a train teacher, I can proudly say that caning of children has never being part of my training, neither have I ever come across any teacher who has told me it has being part of his or her curriculum. There is no single Teacher Training Institution or University, training prospective teachers in this country, where teachers are trained in the use of the cane. Neither have I throughout my over twenty years of teaching and working with youth and young children seen any school inspector inspecting the cane use in our schools or inspecting the velocity of the cane and its effect on our children. The big question is, why are teachers still holding to an outmoded method of teaching introduced by the colonial masters who went back and reformed their educational system because they have realized that it does not work?

There are schools in this country, where children are treated like human beings and are respected by their teachers. In these schools, teacher-students relationship is not based on fear but mutual respect.

I work in a school under OrphanAid Africa at Ayenyah in the Dodowa Circuit in the Greater Accra Region where, right from Nursery through to the JHS, no teacher uses violence against the children yet the teachers are teaching and the children are learning. The same applies to the Future Leaders Academy at Woe in the Keta Municipality in the Volta Region. There are so many schools in this country where children are well treated. We can do same in all schools and what teachers need to learn is how to handle young children without the use of violence.

When an institution keeps on doing what it has done over the years, it would keep on being what it has always being and get the same results. Nothing changes unless one makes things to change and there is no better time for change than now.

Education is changing all over the world; let us reform our educational institutions starting from our training institutions.

Corporal punishment must end in our institutions now. No more excuses, let us remember that failure to do so, we are sowing the seeds of a heartless, uncaring, inhuman society infected with apathy, contempt, hate, fear, aggression, disrespect, resentment and vengeance – a society in which no one would want to live. We reap what we sow. Let us have it in mind that every child becomes what he lived.

Credit goes to those reform-minded legislators who led the crusade against domestic violence. More power to them. But somebody should remind them that real reform can only begin after they've honestly examined the root of the problem. Anything short of that is self-deception.

The real reform begins from our homes and our schools. Non-violence begins from home and world peace start from home. Let us save our homes and save our children and save the world.

Christian Platini Ashiagbor
Counsellor