

Corporal Punishment and Later Life Outcomes: Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam

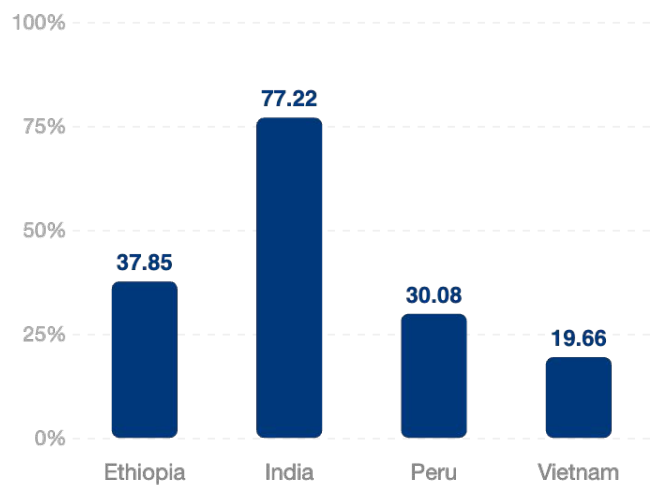
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This policy brief draws on longitudinal Young Lives study to examine how exposure to corporal punishment in childhood shapes later life outcomes. Our findings show that such exposure at age 8 is associated with weaker cognitive and psychosocial outcomes in adolescence at age 15, with more limited evidence of persistence into later life at ages 19-22. These findings suggest that legal prohibitions alone are insufficient, and that effective policy should combine enforcement with teacher training, public awareness campaigns, and community engagement.

Corporal Punishment in Schools is Prevalent, but Variable Across Countries

Figure 1 shows that corporal punishment exposure remained substantial across all four countries in 2009, with rates ranging from a high of 77% in India to a low of 20% in Vietnam. High exposure persisted even in India and Vietnam, where corporal punishment was formally prohibited in schools, highlighting a gap between legislation and classroom practice.

Fig 1: Corporal Punishment Exposure Rates



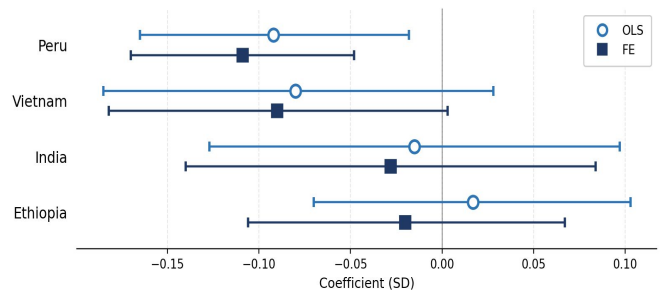
Corporal Punishment in Schools is Linked to Poorer Learning and Psychosocial Outcomes

Figure 2 shows that corporal punishment is linked to worse outcomes in key areas of child development, although the strength of evidence varies by country.

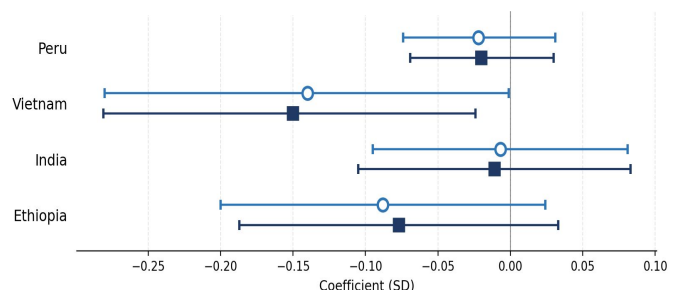
In Peru, it is associated with lower cognitive performance, while in Vietnam it is associated with weaker psychosocial well-being. In other countries, the relationships are generally negative but not statistically significant.

Fig 2: Negative Impacts on Learning and Psychosocial Well-being at Age 15

Cognitive Performance



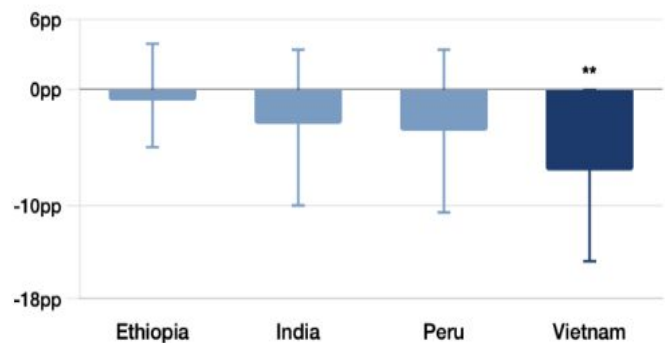
Composite Psychosocial Index



Negative Enrollment Effects Concentrated in Vietnam

Figure 3 shows that the impact of corporal punishment on educational enrollment is negative and significant in Vietnam, with a 9-percentage-point decline under baseline OLS and a 7-percentage-point decline under the more robust model.

Fig 3: Negative Impact on Educational Enrollment at Ages 19-22



Note: Lighter bars are not significant at the 5% level

Policy Implications

Governments should move beyond legislation alone and invest in implementation:

- At school level, corporal punishment is often driven by classroom constraints, such as overcrowded classes and inadequate training. **Teacher training programs** aimed at fostering positive discipline and classroom management can minimize use of physical punishment and improve learning outcomes.
- At household and community levels, corporal punishment is often sustained by beliefs that it is necessary for discipline or character-building. **Public awareness campaigns and community engagement** can reshape these norms by emphasizing the long-term harms and promoting non-violent parenting strategies.

Methodology

To estimate how exposure to corporal punishment at age 8 is associated with later outcomes, we first use a data-driven method (Post-Double-Selection LASSO) to identify the most relevant factors, such as child and household characteristics, that may influence punishment exposure and subsequent outcomes. We then use the selected variables as controls in subsequent OLS regressions, including cluster fixed effects. Second, we estimate the relationship between early exposure to corporal punishment and later outcomes, including learning, psychosocial skills, mental health, school participation, and employment. Finally, to move beyond correlation and get closer to a causal interpretation, we use the broader disciplinary environment (Average corporal punishment witnessed by other children in the community) as an instrument for individual exposure, allowing us to isolate the causal effect of corporal punishment.

