



Beating is a common form of corporal punishment in schools.

Corporal punishment still thriving in schools

Pain for results. At the beginning of every term, one of the secondary schools in Mukono District reportedly procures a sack of canes and distributes it among the teachers. The teachers use them to punish students who don't excel in examinations set at school level.

BY JANE NAFULA

In 2006, government through the Ministry of Education and Sports banned corporal punishment through a circular, and encouraged schools to opt for positive discipline.

Currently, corporal punishment is legally prohibited in Uganda's schools and penal system, however, it persists. The Children (Amendment) Act of 2016, which explicitly bans corporal punishment, with offenders facing up to three years in prison or fines. While the government has mandated positive discipline, enforcement remains an ongoing challenge in some schools.

According to Ms Yvonne Laruni, Programme Manager at Raising Voices, an organisation that advocates for a violence free school environment, beating is the most common form of corporal punishment in schools.

"It is an issue of mindset. We still have teachers, who believe and they are convinced that you cannot teach without caning learners, because that is how they were socialised," she explains.

"When you tell them to opt for alternative ways of disciplining students, they claim you are spoiling, the learners by handling them with soft gloves."

Ms Laruni cites academic pressures as a major driver of this vice, where learners who don't attain the desired grade are subjected to caning by teachers who falsely believe that learners fail because they are not concentrating or because they labelled playful, without considering underlying factors that could be the root cause of poor performance.

"Teachers focus a lot on grades because the director wants learners to scores aggregate four or As, so that there is more demand for their school. When there is more demand for their school, then they raise their school tuition at the end of the day, [leading] the chil-

dren out of school when they are disoriented," She asserts.

"You get the grades well, but at what cost? The cost is so high."

She adds that, "teachers need to realise that no learner wants to fail, they are also happy when they excel. Giving them 20 canes of stalks because the mark that they scored is less by 20 marks is detrimental." She explains that corporal punishment exerts both physical and emotional effects on learners.

In addition, school rules and regulations should be made clear and learners need to be orientated on them so that they are not found on the wrong side of the law.

"They need to be very clear on the consequences. If you're caught stealing, this is what happens. They need to have that discussion with them so that the learners know what the school expects," Ms Laruni says.

"They know what will happen to them if they do contrary."

She says in case a child is found talking in class, the teachers could ask them to change their sitting positions or have them come and sit in front so you can easily supervise them.

EDITOR'S PICK

Why it's high time we drive inclusive education dream

According to stakeholders in the education sector, the challenge of inclusive education largely lies in the limited teacher training, inadequate learning materials and tools, as well as weak implementation of inclusive practices. / P23



Tororo College beat 29 eastern schools in insurance contest

St Peter's College, Tororo students say their victory in the fourth annual secondary schools' insurance contest was achieved through hard work and research. The 2026 edition, held at Mbale SS on April 11, brought together leading secondary schools from Bugisu, Bukedi and Sebei Sub-regions. / P24

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Newspapers in Education

WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS

Call for action. It is time for policymakers, education leaders, teachers, parents, civil society organisations, and the media to prioritise mental well-being in schools if we are to build an inclusive society.

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Ms Frances Atima, the Head of the Directorate of Education Standards in the Ministry of Education and Sports, says corporal punishment remains a big issue in our schools.

"We really like to appeal to our teachers and all stakeholders to look at positive punishment and other alternatives, because corporal punishment remains a pain for our children," Ms Atima says.

She adds: "Sometimes, because our teachers also have their own mental issues. Some children get injuries, others drop out of school. This must stop."

Ms Atima advises that teachers must be supported to appreciate that learning does not take place when children are being inflicted with pain.

"We need to give an enabling environment for all our learners because our children also go through a lot of issues, and now when they are punished, we are just increasing the pain."

She asked policymakers, education leaders, teachers, parents, civil society organisations, and the media to prioritise mental well-being in schools. Mr Robert Ikwap, the Assistant Commissioner for Primary Education in the Education ministry, says the desired learning outcome cannot be achieved if the well-being of learners is not prioritised.

"Learning becomes difficult when a child is anxious, stressed, depressed, and struggling emotionally. The launch of the guide is timely, and school administrators and teachers should utilise it to support the learners," Mr Ik-

Why corporal punishment remains rooted in schools

National News

Stakeholders say unless corporal punishment is addressed in households or homes, it won't be stopped at institutions of learning.

70% of schools punish children against the law – Uwezo report

BY SYLVIA KATUNHASE

A new report reveals that 70 per cent of schools in Uganda still use corporal punishment to discipline learners despite the ban.

The 2024 National Learning and Assessment Report by Uwezo report cites the punishments used most widely as caning and physical work.

The report, which was launched in Kampala on Tuesday, shows that 82 per cent of the schools responded to the ban on corporal punishment often, with 67 per cent using them sometimes while another 30.1 never used them as a form of disciplinary measure.

The Children Act, 2016, defines corporal punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used to cause pain or injury to a child, including actions intended to belittle, humiliate or ridicule the child.

The Uwezo report highlights other measures that schools use to discipline children as verbal warning, informing parents, requesting formal apology, suspension, verbal abuse/insult and detention.

But the reports also show that use of corporal punishment was higher in homes at 85 per cent.

Ms Mary Gwete Nakabugo, the executive director Uwezo Uganda, said, "It's very difficult to get rid of corporal punishment in schools when it's actually highly preferred in households. Maybe the parents even encourage it in schools."

"Unless we address it in the households, it won't stop in schools, and it needs to be a holistic approach of trying to stop it from going home and going to school," she added.

Ms Nakabugo warned that children who are exposed to corporal punishment tend to also practice it when they become adults.

The same report said stealing was the most form of discipline that required disciplinary measures in schools at 41 per cent, followed by escaping from school at 44.7 per cent, fighting/violence to go home and going to school, she added.

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PENALTIES

Section 25 of the Children Act, 2016, bans corporal punishment in schools and learning institutions. The law also prescribes penalties, including imprisonment, for up to three years, and or a fine of up to Shs2 million, and dishonesty at 72 per cent.

The report stressed that nurturing values and life skills as part of children's early learning is equally important. Ms Nakabugo said schools and homes should not only focus on literacy and numeracy but also good values among children.

"We shouldn't just try to teach literacy and numeracy because literacy without values and some fundamental skills

term, she warned.

Ms Brankataga, a member of the Education Service Commission, said corporal punishments were not the best way to discipline a child as it makes matters worse. She advised parents and teachers to always talk to the children whenever they are wrong.

Ms Brankataga said, "We can look at different ways of punishing children and making them listen when you talk to them. When you become harsh, they also become harsh."

She suggested that alternatives like telling the children to apologise, suspending them from school, and verbal warning should be used.

Nevertheless, she said the responsibility of impacting and instilling values in children should not be left to teachers in schools alone.

Ms Brankataga said, "There is a need to make the parent responsible for the responsible for their own learning, while the parents be responsible for the upbringing and learning of the children, as well as the teachers."

"It's not about leaving it to the other party to handle or to deal with. It's a responsibility for all of us," she added.

Dr Joyce Muthu Kaducu, the State minister for Primary Education, who was represented by Mr. Cleophas Muganyizi, the commissioner for Basic Education, said government would ensure the effectiveness of structures in solving persistent challenges like the use of corporal punishments that undermine government's efforts to prevent violence against children in schools.

"The ministry is committed to enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of these structures to promote justice and foster community and parental involvement in children's learning."

In 2025, the *Daily Monitor* ran a story indicating that corporal punishment was still very much alive in schools. PHOTO/FILE

wap says.

For her part, Ms Mary Harriet Ajilong, the Commissioner of Counselling and Guidance, reveals that academic pressure was among the major triggers of mental health issues among learners and teachers.

"The demands of scoring four aggregates in Primary and As in secondary still

bother children. We though change in the grading The system in O-level could change this, but academic pressures persist," she says.

Ms Prossy Nakanjako, a director at Raising Voices, says promoting mental health well-being

in schools will help the country to nurture a generation that is more compassionate and resilient, where people can care for each other.

Both National Mental Health Policy (2014) and the National Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan (2013-2020) provide for the integration of mental health into general health services, strengthening district-level capacity, promotion of community-based care, and reduction of stigma.

2025 REPORT

According to the Auditor General's 2025 report, published in December 2025, Uganda's mental health services remain underdeveloped and fragmented. The lack of integration of mental health into primary healthcare, coupled with weak community surveillance, stigma, and low awareness among schools and local leaders, continues to hinder access and treatment.

"Without significant investment in policy implementation, human resources, community-based care, and inter-sectoral coordination, Uganda risks failing to meet both national health objectives and international commitments on mental health and well-being," Mr Edward Akol, the Auditor General, said.

Troubling numbers

As of 2022 it was estimated that 14 million Ugandans (approximately 32 per cent of the country's population) were suffering from some form of mental disorder. Equally, if not more, troubling, only an estimated 10 per cent of these patients received treatment. Despite efforts such as enactment of the Mental Health Act, Cap 308, introducing the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), and commemorating mental health awareness events, several systemic challenges persist.

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70% MENTAL HEALTH SURGE