Results of the Social and Behavior Change Communication Campaign in Uganda to Eliminate Corporal Punishment in Schools.

How can communication be used to reduce corporal punishment in Ugandan schools?

This question informed the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity’s social and behavior change communication (SBCC) pilot. The SBCC intervention contributed to shifting teachers’ attitudes, norms, and behavior regarding corporal punishment and positive discipline. The pilot suggests that continued and intermittent periodic messaging that is consistently refined is an effective methodology for changing teacher behavior.

In 2006, the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) enacted a policy prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in schools. Despite this longstanding policy, the practice remains prevalent in schools. Corporal punishment is defined as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort. Conversely, positive discipline is defined as a form of discipline that focuses on promoting positive behavior without verbally or physically hurting a child. According to a 2016 baseline survey, 84% of primary school learners had experienced physical corporal punishment at school and 41% had experienced labor corporal punishment (RTI, 2016).

I. SBCC Theory

SBCC theory and strategies are built on decades of research and practice from the public health field. SBCC methodology recognizes that a broad range of factors influence an individual’s behaviors: from their beliefs, family, and community norms, to the physical and policy environment. A basic tenet of SBCC is that information is necessary but seldom sufficient to sustainably change behavior (Communication for Change [C-Change Project, 2012]). Therefore, interventions must go beyond educating or sensitizing people and bridge the gap between awareness and action by influencing the beliefs that can block or enable the needed behavior change.

The SBCC pilot campaign was informed by the Integrative Model of Behavior Change proposed by Fishbein (2000) and refined by Fishbein and Cappella (2006). According to this model, behavior is influenced by environmental factors, skills, abilities, and intention.
Communication primarily affects three factors that influence intention: (1) attitude, (2) norms, and (3) self-efficacy. Each of these factors is influenced by a person’s beliefs, which are the most effective target for communication (Fishbein & Cappella, 2006).

### Factor 1: Attitude
A person’s overall favorable or unfavorable feelings toward the behavior and evaluation of the outcome of the behavior.

A belief that influences attitudes might be, “my learners will not respect me if I don’t cane them” or “using corporal punishment is the only way to manage a large class.”

### Factor 2: Norms
Perceptions of what others think and what others are doing.

A normative belief might be, “parents expect me to beat their children when they misbehave or don’t work hard” or “other teachers beat children. If I try positive discipline techniques they will think I am trying to make them look bad.”

### Factor 3: Self-efficacy
Confidence in one’s ability to perform the behavior, even under difficult circumstances.

A self-efficacy belief might claim, “I can’t discipline my learners without the threat of corporal punishment” or “I tried positive discipline once but it didn’t work.”

The integrative model also suggests that behavior is unlikely to change based on communication alone—other environmental factors, skills, and abilities must also be addressed. For example, communication promoting positive discipline is unlikely to be effective if teachers have never been trained on the techniques.

## 2. Description of Intervention
The pilot intervention exposed teachers to a number of tested communication messages constructed to shift the way they think and feel about corporal punishment and help them form the intention to stop using corporal punishment and attempt positive discipline practices. The goal, over time, is to shift social norms that perpetuate the use of corporal punishment and create new norms that promote positive discipline. The SBCC intervention consisted of radio spots and programs, posters in the community, and drama performances and interpersonal communication at schools.

Primary school teachers and head teachers were the target audience. The secondary target audience included parents of primary-school-age children; school officials; and local political, cultural, and religious leaders or influencers. SBCC evidence suggests that the most effective campaigns use multiple channels simultaneously: mass media; mid-media, such as posters and drama; and interpersonal communication at schools.

### 3. Results: Reach and Recall
The baseline and endline surveys were done with teachers in the intervention area and the control area. The project surveyed 360 teachers during the baseline conducted in October 2017 and 293 at the endline conducted in August 2018.
The unprompted recall rate among teachers was 95%; that is, 95% of teachers said “yes” when asked if they remembered seeing or hearing any messages about corporal punishment. Those who said “yes” were asked through what channel(s) they received the message. Without prompting, 61% cited radio, 48% said posters, and 41% noted a drama performance. However, 44% of respondents could not recall a specific channel. Once the respondents were prompted (i.e., by being described the interventions or shown images), the overall recall rate increased slightly to 96%. The prompted recall rate, by channel, was 75% for radio, 99% for posters, 79% for drama, and 93% for interpersonal communication. In the prompted recall category, 56% recalled four channels and only 4% were unable to cite a channel.

The intervention’s high level of effectiveness in reaching the target audience could be attributed to teachers being a discrete audience who were settled in one location (school) during the SBCC intervention period. However, the recall rate for the radio materials (61% unprompted and 75% prompted) suggests that teachers also received messages outside of school. This also suggests that parents and the general public likely also received the messages, which is important for social norm change around this issue.

**Message Assessment:** Respondents were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about the messages. These self-reports by the teachers in the intervention area show both their intent to change behavior and actual modification of behavior due to exposure to the SBCC messages. For example, when asked to assess the radio spots, there was a high percentage of teachers who “agreed strongly” or “agreed” with the following statements:

- The radio spot messages were easy to understand (94%).
- I learned something new from the radio spot messages (98%).
- The messages made me feel concerned about the way we discipline learners at school (98%).
- The radio spot messages made me more likely to use alternatives to corporal punishment (98%).

Responses were similar for the other channels, with almost all statements drawing a combined “agree strongly” or “agree” percentage of more than 90%.

**4. Results: Impact**

The impact of the intervention was measured in terms of changes in teachers’ knowledge, attitudes, perception of self-efficacy, norms, and behavior regarding corporal punishment and positive discipline. As noted above under “SBCC Theory,” although behavior change is the ultimate goal for this intervention, the other components are critical markers in the behavior change process.

The surveys were done before and after the SBCC pilot in the intervention area and the control area. The effect was measured using the “difference-in-differences analysis,” which provides the net effect of the intervention after adjusting for the differences between the intervention and control groups. Only statistically significant effects are reported here unless otherwise noted.

**Teacher knowledge and attitudes:** An important outcome of the intervention is ensuring that teachers understand all of the actions that are considered “corporal punishment” and to know positive discipline methods that can be used instead. Concerning non-physical modes of punishment, the number of teachers who cited “asking the child to apologize” increased from 33% at baseline to 41% at endline, compared to a decrease in the control area from 23% at baseline to 12% at endline—4 a net 19 percentage point overall increase. This suggests that teachers who received the intervention were more aware of this key method of positive discipline.

When asked to cite the most effective way to discipline children, very few respondents (less than 4%) mentioned physical punishment. The most cited methods were “explaining to the child why his or her behavior was wrong” and “discussing the child’s behavior with him or her.” However, the results for these two statements were contradictory, to the objective of the campaign, (see Table 1). The number of teachers who considered “discussing the child’s behavior with him or her” decreased slightly in the intervention area and more sharply in the control area. This suggests that without the SBCC pilot, a lower percentage of teachers in the intervention area would have agreed with this discipline method.

**Table 1: Discipline techniques cited as “most effective”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing the child’s behavior with him or her</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining to the child why his or her behavior was wrong</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers were also asked their level of agreement with a number of attitude statements, and the statistically significant results showed positive change. The number of teachers in the intervention area who agreed that corporal punishment is unnecessary for parents to properly raise their children increased from 75% at baseline to 91%. There was also a similar increase in the control, although smaller, from 80% at baseline to 85% at endline.

The SBCC pilot had a notable impact on teachers’ disapproval of acts that they previously condoned, possibly because they did not...
already consider them corporal punishment. The number of teachers who disapproved of putting children in stress positions increased from 89% to 98% in the intervention area, while in the control area it remained at about 90%. When it came to subjecting children to hard labor, the percentage of teachers who disapproved increased marginally from 96% to 97% in the intervention area and decreased from 96% to 91% in the control area, suggesting a positive impact on teachers’ disapproval of this type of punishment. These acts of corporal punishment do not involve teachers’ use of their body parts (such as a hand) or an object to inflict pain on a child. Given that acts that involve teacher’s use of their body parts did not register statistically significant changes, it appears that the intervention broadened teachers’ understanding of the other forms of corporal punishment.

Social norms: One of the most important effects of an SBCC intervention is discussions of the issue as a marker of potential change in social norms; this is especially important with a longstanding cultural practice, such as corporal punishment. The SBCC intervention was successful at spurring such conversations: More teachers in the intervention area said they had discussed the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment of learners with a fellow teacher, changing from 92% at baseline to 98% at endline, while the number barely changed in the control area from its initial level of 92%.

When asked if they agreed that corporal punishment is common in their schools, the proportion of teachers who said “yes” dropped by half in the intervention area, from 14% to 7%, but increased from 8% to 10% in the control area. The number of those who agreed that fellow teachers would approve of them subjecting learners to corporal punishment dropped from 17% at baseline to 12% at endline in the intervention area, while staying effectively the same in the control area: about 15%.

Teachers’ behavior: Ultimately, the aim of this SBCC intervention was to change teachers’ behavior. There was no statistically significant change in the number of teachers reporting using corporal punishment in the previous seven or 30 days. However, when teachers were asked if they had tried to stop a fellow teacher from using corporal punishment (Table 2), there was a dramatic positive change in both areas. More teachers in the intervention area reported to use selected positive discipline at endline. Those who said they “asked learners to apologize” increased from 37% at baseline to 59% at endline, while in the control area the use of this technique decreased from 28% to 16%. The number of teachers who “advised learners to behave better” declined sharply in the control area, from 72% to 49%, and changed only slightly in the intervention area, from 67% to 63%. It should be noted that at endline, 96% of teachers in the intervention area and 80% in the control area said they had been trained in positive discipline techniques. In general, longstanding behaviors with deep cultural roots tend to be hardest to change, so the fact that this initial campaign showed some impact on the use of positive discipline is notable.

5. Conclusion
The SBCC intervention showed positive impact in most of the targeted components. Although some of the impacts were small, they were in line with the normal expected outcomes for a single campaign. The statistical significance suggests that the teachers exposed to the intervention changed attitudes, knowledge, and social norms, all of which are markers for eventual behavior change. As with any deep-rooted behavior, widespread change requires ongoing periodic messaging—i.e., robust campaigns at least once per year—with continued refinement of messages so that they stay relevant as behaviors and social norms change.

The full report can be found here: https://shared.rti.org/content/social-and-behavior-change-communication-reduce-primary-teachers-use-corporal-punishment

References

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