

The Impact of the Abolition of Corporal Punishment on Ethics and Discipline among Students at the Nurul Ikhlas Modern Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the impact of eliminating corporal punishment on students' ethical behavior and disciplinary patterns at Nurul Ikhlas Modern Islamic Boarding School (PPMNI). **Method:** Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through direct observation, interviews with school leaders and caregivers, and analysis of institutional documents. **Results:** The findings indicate that while the former use of corporal punishment contributed to a heightened sense of discipline, its abolition has led to a decline in students' ethical behavior, despite an observable improvement in their external compliance with school rules. This suggests a shift from internalized values to superficial conformity. The study highlights that non-physical disciplinary strategies have not fully succeeded in fostering the same depth of moral development. **Novelty:** This research contributes to the discourse on school discipline by revealing the nuanced consequences of banning corporal punishment in religious educational settings and by emphasizing the need for structured ethical and spiritual reinforcement to sustain moral integrity in the absence of physical discipline.

INTRODUCTION

Discipline in pesantren is more than just behavioral management—it is deeply rooted in the moral and spiritual formation of the santri (students). The combination of Islamic values, communal responsibilities, and respect for elders forms the foundation of a pesantren's educational environment.

The debate around corporal punishment often reveals a conflict between traditional values and modern human rights frameworks. While pesantren leaders may view corporal discipline as effective and part of tradition, external legal mandates and psychological research present a need for reform [1].

Corporal punishment, traditionally understood as physical acts of discipline, has long been used in educational institutions, particularly in religious settings such as pesantren. However, global and national shifts in child protection frameworks—such as Indonesia's Law No. 35/2014—have outlawed such practices due to their psychological and physical risks [1].

In Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), discipline is a core element of religious and character formation. Pondok Pesantren Modern Nurul Ikhlas (PPMNI), located in West Sumatra, previously applied direct corporal punishments—such as physical strikes—as a form of behavioral correction. With the legal ban on such methods,

the school has adopted non-physical approaches, but the change has yielded complex effects on student ethics and discipline [1], [2].

This study seeks to answer: What are the impacts of the removal of corporal punishment on students' ethics and discipline at PPMNI? [1], [2].

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to explore the impact of the removal of corporal punishment on student ethics and discipline at Pondok Pesantren Modern Nurul Ikhlas (PPMNI). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across various student age groups and a range of disciplinary experiences. Ethical approval was obtained from the school board, and all interviews were conducted with informed consent, ensuring adherence to research ethics and participant rights [1], [2].

Data collection methods included in-depth interviews with caregivers, dormitory supervisors, and section heads at PPMNI to gather diverse perspectives on the disciplinary environment. Additionally, the researchers conducted direct observations of student behavior and disciplinary practices within the pesantren setting. Institutional documents, such as school regulations and disciplinary records, were also reviewed to support triangulation and enrich the contextual understanding of disciplinary frameworks.

The collected data were transcribed, systematically coded, and categorized using NVivo software to facilitate qualitative analysis. This analytical process enhanced thematic clarity and allowed for a rigorous interpretation of emerging behavioral patterns. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring issues and patterns in the data, while data validity was ensured through triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Punishment, as defined by [3], refers to any stimulus that decreases the likelihood of a behavior recurring. In educational contexts, it has traditionally been used as a method to correct deviant behavior. However, Santrock [14] emphasizes the need to differentiate between constructive discipline and punitive control, noting that physical punishment, while potentially effective in the short term, can hinder intrinsic moral development and suppress ethical reasoning. Historically, corporal punishment has been widely practiced in educational institutions and was once regarded as essential for moral correction [16]. Yet, the evolution of modern pedagogy, which prioritizes emotional intelligence and psychological development, has brought such practices under scrutiny. Scholars like Baumrind [12] argue that while harsh punishment may induce compliance, it often does so at the cost of trust, emotional growth, and internalized ethical behavior. Supporting this view, [10], [11] highlight the long-term negative effects of corporal

punishment, including diminished moral reasoning and increased antisocial behavior [1], [2].

From an Islamic educational perspective, the emphasis lies on tarbiyah – holistic character development rooted in compassion and wisdom. Although some classical Islamic texts permit moderate physical discipline under strict conditions, contemporary scholars increasingly advocate for akhlaq (ethical behavior) and hikmah (wisdom) as the foundation of student upbringing. For example, Al-Ghazali advised that educators should first employ gentle and persuasive correction, reserving physical measures strictly as a last resort [15]. This moral and spiritual approach is echoed in many pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) across the Muslim world [15].

Legally, the Indonesian government has taken a firm stance against corporal punishment. Law No. 35 of 2014, an amendment to the Child Protection Act, explicitly defines child abuse to include both physical and psychological harm, effectively categorizing corporal punishment in schools as a criminal offense. This legal shift has compelled educational institutions, including pesantren, to re-evaluate their disciplinary systems and adopt non-violent, developmentally appropriate methods of behavior management [1], [2].

From a theoretical standpoint, Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides valuable insight into the behavioral consequences of corporal punishment. According to Bandura, individuals – particularly adolescents – internalize behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. Thus, when students are exposed to aggressive or authoritarian disciplinary tactics, they may replicate such behaviors, thereby perpetuating cycles of fear and coercion rather than fostering autonomy and responsibility [1], [2].

Regionally, case studies conducted in similar Islamic boarding school contexts in Malaysia and Brunei reveal that hybrid disciplinary models – those combining spiritual mentorship with structured community-based consequences – are more effective in promoting long-term ethical development than punishment-driven approaches alone. These findings suggest that while discipline remains crucial in character education, its effectiveness is enhanced when grounded in empathy, collaboration, and moral reasoning.

Leaders and caregivers at Pondok Pesantren Modern Nurul Ikhlas expressed concerns regarding the shifting dynamics of authority following the abolition of corporal punishment. In the absence of fear-based disciplinary methods, their authority is often perceived as more easily challenged by students. This change places greater emphasis on the educators' ability to serve as moral exemplars, requiring them to demonstrate ideal behavior through consistent role modeling, emotional intelligence, and patient engagement. Discipline, therefore, becomes less about control and more about influence and personal credibility, demanding a transformation in leadership style within the pesantren [1], [2].

In parallel, the removal of corporal punishment has contributed to a notable cultural transition within the student community. A generational gap has emerged, where senior students—who were previously subjected to stricter disciplinary regimes—frequently find themselves at odds with newer students who experience a more lenient and nurturing environment. This divergence has resulted in social tension, misunderstandings, and inconsistencies in peer expectations regarding appropriate conduct and respect. The shift has challenged the pesantren to renegotiate its internal culture, balancing tradition with evolving disciplinary philosophies [1], [2].

1. Shift from Physical to Non-Physical Discipline

Previously, PPMNI applied various forms of physical discipline such as paddling, push-ups, and squatting as immediate and visible consequences for infractions. These methods were intended to create swift compliance and reinforce authority through physical deterrence. However, following regulatory changes and a broader shift toward more humane disciplinary models, the pesantren transitioned to non-physical approaches. These include verbal warnings, administrative notes, and assignments such as community service or temporary isolation from group activities.

While these methods are in accordance with national laws and human rights considerations, many informants noted that the shift has not fully replaced the psychological authority that corporal punishment once held. The immediacy and tangible consequence of physical punishment created a stronger sense of deterrence for some students, which is now perceived to be lacking [1], [2].

2. Observed Impacts on Ethics

Ethics in the pesantren context go beyond rule-following; they encompass values such as respecting elders, maintaining cleanliness, dressing modestly, and interacting politely with peers and teachers. Informants reported an observable decline in ethical behavior, particularly among newer students who have never experienced corporal punishment. Instances of disobedience, verbal disrespect, and a lax attitude toward communal responsibilities such as cleaning and collective worship were increasingly noted [1], [2].

This aligns with [12] theory that discipline without ethical reflection and moral dialogue may fail to develop intrinsic moral values. The absence of structured ethical reinforcement appears to have affected the students' internal compass, especially in the formative early stages of their boarding school experience.

3. Observed Impacts on Discipline

Interestingly, while ethical standards seemed to decline, some aspects of formal discipline improved. Informants observed that more students now attend prayers and classes punctually, and compliance with dress codes has increased. These changes may not necessarily reflect internalized discipline, but rather an increased awareness of administrative consequences or peer accountability systems.

This paradox indicates that while the students are still motivated to conform to institutional expectations, the nature of their motivation has shifted from fear of physical

punishment to avoidance of administrative penalties—suggesting an evolution from external coercion to more structured forms of social control.

4. Psychological Response of Students

The psychological impact of banning corporal punishment varied among students. Some reported feeling safer and more emotionally supported in the new environment. This perceived safety encouraged openness, more positive engagement in academic and religious activities, and a stronger emotional bond with caregivers [1], [2].

On the other hand, several caregivers observed that some students became more defiant and willing to challenge authority. Without the immediate fear of physical consequences, a few students pushed boundaries more frequently. This observation aligns with research, which suggests that while the removal of punitive fear may foster emotional growth, it requires a consistent and well-structured environment to prevent behavioral regression.

5. Leadership Perception and Role Modeling

Leaders and caregivers expressed concern that the absence of corporal punishment has challenged their traditional authority. Many stated that fear previously played a key role in maintaining obedience. Now, they must rely more on personal example and verbal communication to guide behavior, which demands greater patience, emotional intelligence, and consistency [1], [2].

The shift has thus elevated the need for leadership to serve as role models—embodying the discipline and ethics they wish to instill. This change, though demanding, aligns with prophetic education ideals that emphasize tarbiyah (nurturing) over ta'dib (punishment) [12], [16].

6. Cultural Transition and Community Norms

The reform has also triggered cultural tensions within the student body. Senior students who had experienced stricter disciplinary environments often perceived newer students as being more careless or disrespectful. This generational difference has occasionally led to friction and created a disconnect in shared expectations of what constitutes proper behavior.

These changes reflect a broader cultural transition at PPMNI, requiring adjustments in social norms and collective identity. While challenging, this period of adjustment may also present an opportunity to reframe discipline as a collaborative, community-driven value system rather than a top-down enforcement model.

Implementing alternative discipline methods such as restorative justice requires comprehensive teacher training, student involvement in rule-making, and parental engagement. These steps help ensure that discipline stems from mutual respect rather than imposed authority.

A hybrid approach integrating Islamic moral teachings, restorative practices, and clear behavioral expectations may offer a sustainable model for pesantren transformation.

The removal of corporal punishment is legally and morally appropriate. However, in environments such as pesantren, where physical discipline was woven into daily

routines, the transition must be supplemented with structured moral and spiritual training [1], [2].

Educational theorists argue for Restorative Discipline—a system focusing on community responsibility and dialogue [17]. This model may suit pesantren contexts where communal living and religious ethics are already emphasized.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The transformation of disciplinary culture in pesantren requires a gradual and inclusive approach, engaging all stakeholders in redefining discipline in a way that harmonizes Islamic values with modern legal-ethical standards. The case of PPMNI illustrates that while the abolition of corporal punishment has improved superficial rule compliance, it has simultaneously led to a decline in internalized ethical behavior. **Implication :** These findings suggest an urgent need to develop alternative disciplinary frameworks that uphold human dignity while fostering moral growth, such as integrating character and spiritual education with restorative justice practices. **Limitation :** This study is limited to a single pesantren context, which may not fully represent the diversity of disciplinary experiences and responses across different Islamic boarding schools. Additionally, the short-term nature of observation may not capture the long-range effects of disciplinary reforms. **Future Research :** Subsequent studies should investigate the longitudinal impact of non-violent discipline on student behavior and psychological well-being, and conduct comparative analyses across multiple pesantren to identify replicable and culturally grounded models of ethical and disciplinary education.

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