

Measuring and Improving Indian Students' Physical and Emotional Safety in School

A Summary Brief Based on the Impact Evaluation Findings of STiR Education's Programmes in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, India



Study Context

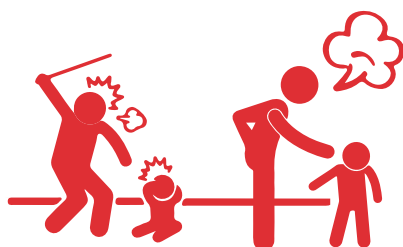
STiR Education commissioned Ichuli Institute, an independent research organisation headquartered in Kampala, Uganda, to investigate long-term trends and impacts from their programme over 4 years in Karnataka state and Tamil Nadu state in India.

The goal of the study is to understand how the STiR programme impacts the intrinsic motivation – the self-motivation, drive, interest and satisfaction in engaging in a behaviour or activity – of students, teachers and education officials in order to improve teaching practices and student learning.



The Challenge

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all **corporal punishment of children is prohibited under international law**. India ratified the Convention in 1992 and **formally banned corporal punishment in all private and public schools** in 2010. However, according to the Indian Government, 65% to 99% of children still experience physical and mental abuse at the hands of their teachers.¹



65% to 99%

of school children still experience physical and mental abuse at the hands of their teachers

In an effort to make classrooms and schools safer for children, **STiR's programme helps teachers create positive and healthy physical and emotional learning environments.**

STiR measures safety at school by studying the relationship between students and their teachers and the use of verbal and physical punishment. Key indicators include teachers' and children's positive relationship, use of physical punishment/negative words and children's self-reported feelings of safety at school. **The independent evaluation investigated these outcomes, additionally exploring teacher, children, head teacher/master and EL/ELM* beliefs and practices around school violence, corporal punishment and bullying.**

¹ Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, (2019), 'Guest feature: Corporal punishment of India's school children', <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/corporal-punishment-of-indias-school-children/>

* EL stands for Education Leader and ELM stands for Education Leader Manager in STiR's programme. In Karnataka, ELs are Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs) and ELMs are Block Resource Persons (BRPs). In Tamil Nadu, ELs are Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTEs) and ELMs are Block Resource Teacher Educator Supervisors (BRTE Supervisors)



The Findings

Year 1 of the study found that **students in both states overwhelmingly reported liking school and feeling safe there.** Independent observers in classrooms primarily witnessed teachers treating students respectfully and creating an enjoyable, emotional connection with them. In Karnataka, **most students said that their teachers call on them by name.** Moreover, nearly all ELs in Karnataka observed that teachers smile and laugh with students. In Tamil Nadu most students said that their teachers smile and laugh with them and 28% reported having asked someone at school for help, indicating that **some students trust adults at their school to help them with their problems.**

However, the study found evidence to indicate that **corporal punishment is deeply entrenched in school cultures** in both states and widely used by school actors, despite it being an illegal practice in India.



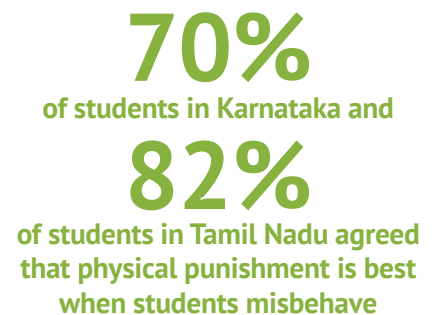
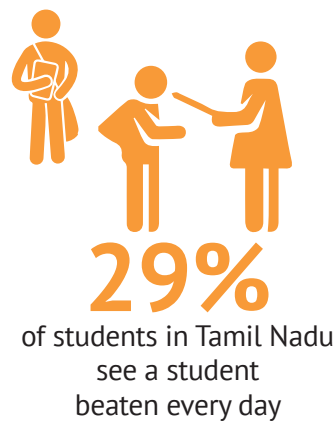
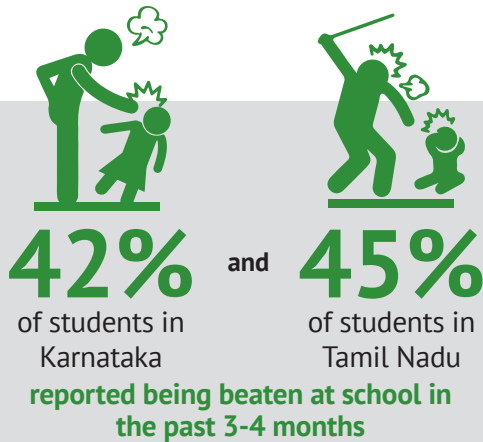
93%
of students in
Tamil Nadu and
98%
in Karnataka
reported liking
school and
feeling
safe there



The studies
in both states
concluded
that:

Teachers self-reported and were observed being welcoming, friendly and respectful towards students. But, conversely, students reported that corporal punishment is a common method of discipline with a high percentage of students believing it is the best means of discipline, indicating a disconnect between purported feelings of safety at school and normalised physical punishment practices.

These findings indicate that there is **likely a mismatch between what students report about feelings of safety and what they are actually experiencing.** Although the majority of students reported feeling safe, 42% of students in Karnataka reported being beaten at school in the past 3-4 months, primarily by their teacher or head teacher. On average, students in Karnataka reported having been beaten thrice in the last two weeks. The situation in Tamil Nadu is similar with 45% of students reporting that they were physically punished in the past 3-4 months and 29% of students reporting seeing another student physically punished on a daily basis.



One **possible explanation for this mismatch is students' attitudes towards physical punishment.** When asked if they believed the best way to discipline a student who breaks the rules was through physical punishment, 70% of students in Karnataka and 82% of students in Tamil Nadu agreed. These results suggest that **students may not correlate being physically punished with feeling unsafe at school.** It is possible that physical punishment at home and school are normalised for many students and they are unaware that corporal punishment is a characteristic of an unsafe school.



Teachers are welcoming and friendly... and use physical punishment to discipline...

but education stakeholders often do not admit this is the case.

The study also found that a **teacher being welcoming and friendly is not necessarily mutually exclusive from a teacher that uses physical punishment**, although school stakeholders were somewhat reluctant to admit using or witnessing it. In Karnataka, only 23% of teachers and 30% of head teachers reported having beaten a child in their class. In Tamil Nadu, only 27% of teachers and 26% of head masters reported the same and nearly all ELs/ELMs denied witnessing physical punishment in schools. This **failure to admit to the common practice of physical punishment** is likely related to the fact that India has strict laws on it, but their **denial may hinder efforts to change the practice** and make schools safer for students.



Finally, although verbal punishment was not a problem often cited in Tamil Nadu, it was a practice that about one quarter of teachers and head teachers admitted to witnessing in Karnataka. **The majority of these teachers and 17% of ELs/ELMs said they have witnessed verbal abuse from teachers between 1-5 times in the last week.** Despite this, only 7% of students reporting having been verbally abused recently, indicating that **children and teachers likely interpret what qualifies as verbal abuse differently.**



Recommendations for STiR and its Government Partners

STiR works to **strengthen the education system and empower stakeholders** including teachers, head teachers/masters and ELs/ELMs to **perform their respective functions.**



Going forward, STiR and its government partners should focus on:

1

Reiterating the government's ban on corporal punishment at school and ensuring all school actors know and understand the policy and follow it.

Ensuring there are structures, safe guarding policies and reporting mechanisms in place and being applied for identifying and reporting instances of violence.

2

3

Involving education stakeholders and students in targeted activities to improve the safety and emotional well-being of all learners.

Educating teachers about effective, non-physical ways to discipline students and ensuring they are implemented.

4

5

Sensitising ELs/ELMs to apply appropriate sanctions for teachers and head teachers/masters who use corporal punishment.

Sensitising ELs/ELMs about their role to observe and provide support to teachers and head teachers/masters so they can use alternative, non-violence methods of discipline.

6

7

Bringing parents, communities, head teachers/masters and ELs/ELMs together to address school-based violence.

Increasing students' knowledge about their rights in regards to corporal punishment.

8

Recommendations for Adapting the Study's Measurement Methods

Year 1 of the study in both states revealed that **the way school safety is measured must be more holistic since violence and feelings about safety are complex** and cannot be accurately measured through student self-reports and teacher actions alone. Ichuli and STiR are **exploring alternative metrics to measure safety at school** during future evaluation points, which may include collecting additional data about:



1

Peer-to-peer bullying at school;



2

Existence, knowledge and application of policies, structures, reporting mechanisms and disciplinary measures used for curbing corporal punishment and bullying at school;



3

Violence in the community and how it influences feelings about physical punishment and safety at school; and



4

Activities led by stakeholders to reduce violence at school and improve methods of discipline.



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