

# Acceptance of Violence and Its Concomitants Among Students from Three Types of Schools in Pakistan

Nazia Nazar

Karin Österman

Kaj Björkqvist

Åbo Akademi University, Finland

## Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate associations between acceptance of violence and victimisation from physical punishment by teachers, self-esteem, and psychological concomitants among students from three school systems in Pakistan. A questionnaire was completed by 550 girls, and 550 boys. The mean age for girls was 13.3 years, and for boys 14.1. Boys accepted violence significantly more than girls. Students in Urdu Medium schools accepted violence significantly more than students in the Madrassa, and students in English Medium schools accepted it significantly least of all. In English Medium schools, girls accepted violence significantly more than boys, in Urdu Medium schools there was no sex difference, and in the Madrassa, boys accepted it significantly more than girls. Respondents who scored higher than average on acceptance of violence scored significantly higher on victimisation from physical punishment by teachers, anxiety, depression, and hostility, and had significantly lower self-esteem.

**Keywords:** acceptance of violence, Pakistan, Urdu Medium, English medium, Madrassa, physical punishment by teachers, psychological concomitants

## Introduction

The aim of the study was to investigate associations between acceptance of violence in general, victimisation from physical punishment by a teacher, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and hostility among students from three school systems in Pakistan.

## Violence in Pakistan

Pakistan has undergone different forms of violence to such an extent that violence has become a daily phenomenon. Among many different forms of violence, the most common and frequently practiced forms include domestic violence against women and children, and sectarian violence. It has been found that 34% of married women

have become victims of physical, sexual, or emotional violence perpetrated by their spouses (National Institute of Population Studies, 2019). Pakistan has been experiencing sectarian violence since the 1980s. The Madrassa have played a significant role in sectarian violence in Pakistan (Grare, 2007), as Madrassas are established on the basis of sects i.e. *Sunni* and *Shia* Madrassas. The Sunni Madrassas are further divided into many sects, which include *Deobandi* Madrassa, *Barelvi* Madrassa and *Ahlehadis* Madrassa. Many violent sectarian organisations in Pakistan originate from Madrassa (International Crisis Group, 2002). The *Sunni* and *Shia* Madrassa have been funded by Saudi Arabia and Iraq respectively (Grare, 2007). The violent activities of sectarian organisations like *Sipa e Sahaba*, *Lashkr e Jhangvi*, *Jaishe Muhammad* and *Harkatul Mujahedin* have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people on sectarian basis. Around 5,037 people have been killed in sectarian violence in Pakistan between 1989-2015 (Asma & Muhammad, 2017).

### **Violence against Children in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, children are raised in an environment replete with violence; they experience violence in both domestic and public domains. In a study, it was found that approximately, 84 % of the children were victims of psychological abuse, 74% of physical violence, 73% of child neglect, and 42% entered child labour (Zakar, 2016). A large number of children become victims of violence in their workplace (Hyder & Malik, 2007). Children are also victimised in the homes. According to a survey conducted among 4,200 children in Pakistan between 5–16-year-old, all the children were victims of physical punishment by their parents at home (Holden & Ashraf, 2016). The most frequently practiced forms of punishment at home include slapping, hitting with stick, and kicking. Victimization of children from physical punishment is also common in schools. According to a study, physical punishment is used in order to discipline children in around 89% of both public and private schools in Pakistan (Holden & Ashraf, 2016).

### **Acceptance of Violence and Acceptance of Physical Punishment**

Several studies have reported that males accept violence to a higher degree than women (Kaura, & Lohman, 2007; Yorohan, 2011). High levels of approval of violence has also been shown to be associated with a higher likelihood to be both a victim and a perpetrator of violence (Spencer, Morgan, Bridges, Washburn-Busk, & Stith, 2017). If peers have accepting attitudes towards aggression, it predicts aggressive behaviour in school children (Jung, Krahe, & Busching, 2018). The link was mediated by external locus of control. The authors argue that beliefs of non-control promote aggressive behaviour in children. External locus of control is the tendency to locate causes for events outside the self (Connell, 1985). Another study has also revealed that peers' accepting attitudes of aggression promoted aggression but only for children with low levels of prosocial behaviour (Jung & Schröder-Abé, 2019).

It has been argued that accepting attitudes towards violence could serve as coping mechanism in a situation where the victim has no possibility to defend her/himself or to flee the situation. For women, but not for men, accepting attitudes towards rape in intimate relationships has been found to correlate significantly positively with frequency of victimization from sexual abuse in the relationship (Nakyazze, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2018). Victimization from physical punishment during childhood and approval of physical punishment in adulthood have also been found to be correlated (Bower-Russa, Knutson, & Winebarger, 2001; Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003).

Cultural factors are associated with approval of physical punishment. Higher levels of approval have been found among students from Asian universities than students from European universities (Douglas, 2006). Approval rates are also lower among women than men and belonging to an affluent family was related to lower levels. In a study carried out in Pakistan, 65% of the teachers were found to accept physical punishment in order to create discipline (Plan Pakistan, 2013). In another study, 76% of the parents also reported that they accepted physical punishment (Holden & Ashraf, 2016).

### **The Educational System in Pakistan**

There are many different types of schools in Pakistan; the main three categories are Urdu Medium, English Medium, and the Madrassa (religious seminaries). Choice of educational system reflects the social-economic class in Pakistan. In the English Medium school system, the elite English Medium schools serve the needs of the ruling and affluent class while the only option for the lower social class is to send their children to public Urdu Medium schools or Madrassa due to their affordability (Khattak, 2014). The enrolment rate to primary and middle school in Pakistan are 71% and 18% respectively (Government of Pakistan, 2017). The school drop-out rate is around 73% for the children between 5–16 years of age (Mughal, Aldridge, & Monaghan, 2019).

The English Medium schools are privately owned by individuals or organisations. According to an estimate, around 25–33% of all children join private schools (Amjad & MacLeod, 2014). There are many categories of English Medium schools; they are characterised by the level of educational performance and the fee of the schools. The elite English Medium schools are expensive, and they are free to charge high tuition fees, administrative fees, and other extra charges. Hence, they cater the needs of the privileged class and disregard the sections of society that cannot afford high tuition fees (Siddiqui & Gorard, 2017). Study performance is better in private schools than in public schools (Amjad, & MacLeod, 2014). Students from elite English Medium schools have been found to have higher self-esteem than students from other types of schools (Nazar, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2020).

Urdu Medium schools are usually in the public sector; 37 % of the middle schools in Pakistan are in the public sector (Government of Pakistan, 2017). The medium of instruction in these schools is Urdu, which is a national language of Pakistan. Urdu Medium schools are usually not well-equipped with modern facilities. Some schools have no actual school building and classes are arranged under the shadow of trees (Raheem, 2015). Schools are not easily accessible; students often need to travel up to five kilometres daily to reach their school. Since these schools are few, the classrooms are usually overcrowded, which affects the quality of education (Raheem, 2013). School burnout has been found to be highest among boys from Urdu Medium schools in Pakistan (Nazar et al., 2020).

The Madrassa are Islamic schools where students get more religious than formal education. There are 32,272 Madrassas in Pakistan of which 3% are in the public sector, and 97% are in the private sector (Government of Pakistan, 2017). The enrolment rate of boys and girls is 65% and 35% respectively. Students mostly come from less educated families (Cockcroft, & et al., 2009). The Madrassas got international attention after 9/11. They have been accused of supporting militancy (Delavande & Zafar, 2015), which is argued to be controversial (Fair, 2008). Although the enrolment rate in Madrassa is around 1 % (Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, Zajonc, 2006) the influence of Madrassa students over the society is much higher than their enrolment rate. The students educated from Madrassa usually aim to be the religious scholars in the future. They work as a pressure group and their influence in the society is far greater than their number (Bano & Ferra, 2018). Previous studies show Madrassa students to have lower levels of religious tolerance than students from English Medium schools (Nazar, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2017), higher levels of anxiety, hostility and depression, and lower levels of self-esteem than students from other school systems (Nazar et al., 2020). Victimization of school children and adolescents in the form of physical punishment is also a common phenomenon in Urdu Medium schools and Madrassa in Pakistan (Nazar, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2019; Save the Children UNICEF, 2005).

## Method

### Sample

A questionnaire was completed by 550 girls, and 550 boys, from three types of schools in Pakistan. The three school types were Urdu Medium (200 girls, 200 boys), English Medium (175 girls, 175 boys), and Madrassa (175 girls, 175 boys). The age range of the students was between 11 and 15 years of age. The mean age for girls was 13.3 years ( $SD$  1.0), and for boys 14.1 ( $SD$  1.0). The age difference between girls and boys was significant ( $t_{(1098)} = 13.89, p < .001$ ).

### Instrument

Acceptance of violence was measured with 12 items. The single items are presented in Table 1. Response alternatives were on a five point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 =

disagree, 2 = undecided, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .86.

Table 1: *Single Items in the Scale Measuring an Accepting Attitude towards Violence (N = 1100)*

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It is ok to use violence to get whatever you want.
People who use violence get respect.
If a person hits you, you should hit them back.
If someone starts a fight you should walk away. *)
It is good to hit a person who commits a crime.
I like to watch movies which are full of violence.
I like to play violent games.
If someone insults or makes fun of your family, it is ok to hit him/her.
If someone insults or makes fun of your religion, it is ok to hit him/her.
If someone insults or make fun of your country, it is ok to hit him/her.
In order to defend your country, war is necessary.
It is ok to hit a Muslim who does not belong to your faith.

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\*) = Recoded

Victimisation from physical punishment by a teacher was measured with a scale consisting of 11 items. Single items of the scale have been published previously (Nazar et al., 2019). The response alternatives were on a five-point scale (0 = never, 1 = seldom, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = very often). Cronbach's Alpha for the scale was = .91. Anxiety, depression, and hostility were measured with three subscales of the the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). Responses were given on a five-point scale (0 = not at all, 1 = slightly, 2 = moderately, 3 = very much, 4 = extremely much). Cronbach's Alphas were .93 for all three scales. Self-esteem was measured with three items from the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965): (a) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself, (b) I feel that I have a number of good qualities, and (c) I am able to do things as well as most other people do. The response alternatives were on a five-point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = undecided, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Cronbach's Alpha for the scale was .77.

## Procedure

The paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed in 17 schools in Lahore, Pakistan. Six Urdu Medium public schools, six English Medium elite schools and five Madrassa took part in the study. The data were collected between December 2016 and April 2017.

## Ethical Considerations

The study was carried out anonymously and in accordance with the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), and guidelines for the responsible conduct of research (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012).

## Results

### Acceptance of Violence among Girls and Boys in Three Types of Schools

A univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) with age as covariate showed significant differences on acceptance of violence for sex [ $F_{(1, 1093)} = 4.76, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .004$ ], for school type [ $F_{(2, 1093)} = 97.85, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .152$ ], and for the interaction between them [ $F_{(2, 1093)} = 36.73, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .063$ ] (Fig. 1). Boys accepted violence significantly more than girls did. Scheffé's test revealed that the students in Urdu Medium schools accepted violence significantly more than the students in the Madrassa, and that the students in English Medium schools accepted it significantly least of all. In English Medium schools, girls accepted violence significantly more than boys [ $t_{(348)} = 4.95, p < .001$ ], in Urdu Medium schools there was no difference between girls and boys, and in the Madrassa boys accepted it significantly more than girls [ $t_{(348)} = 6.69, p < .001$ ].

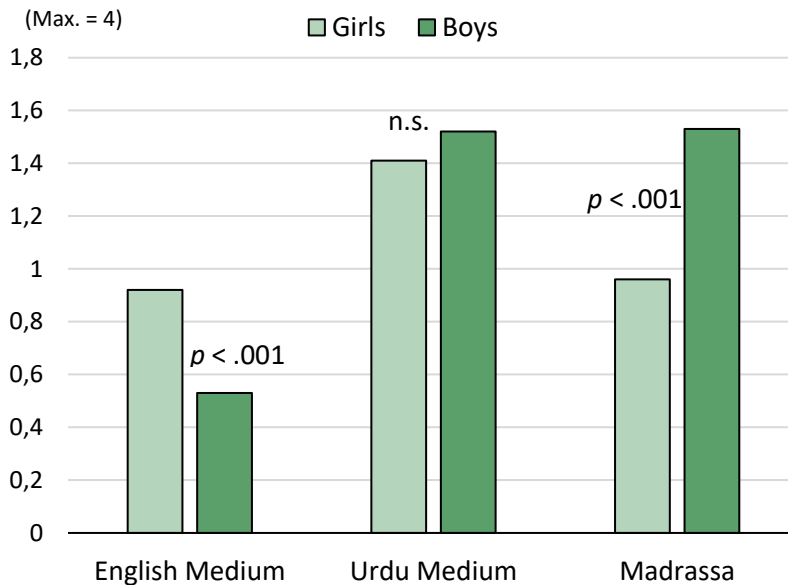


Figure 1. Mean values on acceptance of violence among students from three types of schools in Pakistan ( $N = 1100$ ).

### Concomitants of Acceptance of Violence

Acceptance of violence was, for both girls and boys, significantly correlated at the  $p \leq .001$ -level with victimisation from physical punishment by a teacher, anxiety, depression, and hostility (Table 2). It was also significantly correlated with low self-esteem for boys but not for girls.

**Table 2: Correlations between Acceptance of Violence and Five Other Scales for Girls (n = 550) and Boys (n = 550)**

Acceptance of Violence	Girls	Boys
Victimisation from Physical Punishment by a Teacher	.26 ***	.43 ***
Anxiety	.16 ***	.43 ***
Depression	.26 ***	.44 ***
Hostility	.24 ***	.45 ***
Self-esteem	-.08 †	-.12 **

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ;  $p < .01$ ; †  $p < .10$

Two groups were constructed, one with scores above the average, and one with scores below the average on acceptance of violence (High/Low). A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with acceptance of violence group as independent variable and five scales as dependent variables (Table 3, Fig. 2). The multivariate analysis was significant. Respondents who scored higher than average on acceptance of violence scored significantly higher on victimisation from physical punishment by teachers, anxiety, depression, and hostility, and significantly lower on self-esteem.

**Table 3: Results of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Acceptance of Violence (High/Low) as Independent Variable and Five Scales as Dependent Variables, (N = 1100). Cf. Fig. 2**

	F	df	p <	$\eta^2$
Effect of Acceptance of Violence (High/Low)				
Multivariate analysis	45.02	5, 1094	.001	.171
Univariate analyses				
Victimisation from Physical Punishment by Teachers	104.23	1, 1098	.001	.087
Anxiety	127.76	"	.001	.104
Depression	169.93	"	.001	.134
Hostility	154.29	"	.001	.123
Self-esteem	20.62	"	.001	.018

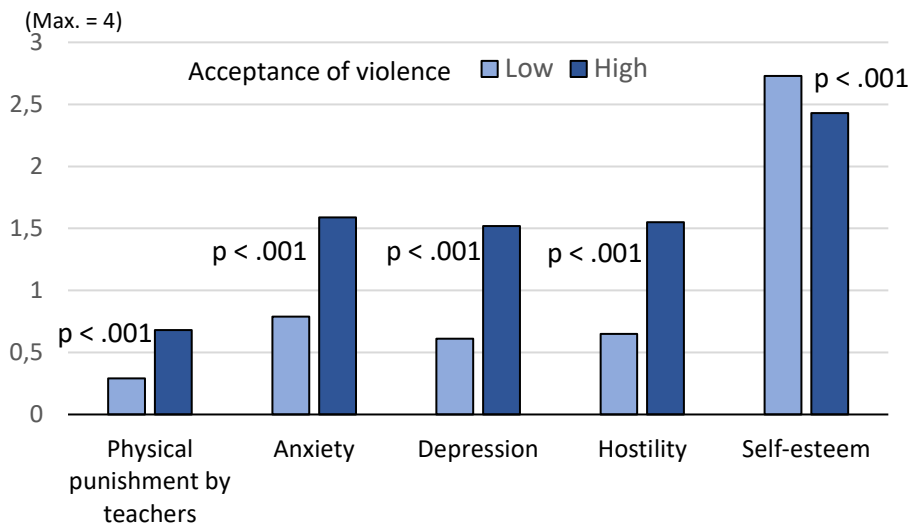


Figure 2. Mean values on five variables for students who reported high vs. low acceptance of violence ( $N = 1100$ ), c.f. Table 2.

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate acceptance of violence, sex differences, and links with anxiety, depression, hostility, and self-esteem among students from Urdu Medium schools, English Medium schools, and Madrassa in Pakistan. In the present study, students in Urdu Medium schools accepted violence significantly more than students in the Madrassa, and students in the English Medium schools accepted it significantly least of all. This result is in line with a previous study where it was found that students from Urdu medium school scored higher on acceptance of physical punishment than students from the Madrassa, and students from English medium school scored lowest (Nazar et al., 2019). Throughout history, the Madrassa have played a significant role in sectarian violence in Pakistan (Grare, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2002). In these two studies, however, the Madrassa students accepted violence in general and physical punishment at school to a lesser degree than students from Urdu schools. The reason for this is not clear. Possibly, since the Madrassa are religious schools, they stress nonviolence more than is done in the Urdu medium schools.

Overall, boys were found to accept violence significantly more than girls did. This result is in line with previous studies where males have been found to have higher levels of acceptance of violence than females (Kim, Lee, & Farber, 2019). However, there was an interaction effect between school system and sex. While boys from the Madrassa accepted violence significantly more than girls, in Urdu schools, girls and boys accepted violence equally much. In English Medium schools, on the other hand, boys accepted violence significantly less than girls, with their mean scores being



lowest of all the groups. The result from the English medium schools is supported by a previous study where boys from this school system accepted physical punishment at school less than girls and boys from the other two school systems (Nazar et al., 2019). The fact that boys from English Medium schools accepted violence in general and physical punishment at school least of all, even less than girls from the same school system, is a positive trend that deserves to be followed up in future studies.

Respondents who scored higher than average on acceptance of violence scored significantly higher on victimisation from physical punishment by teachers. The correlation was higher for boys than for girls. Previous studies have also found a link between victimisation from physical punishment and acceptance of it (Anderson & Kras, 2007; Bower-Russa, et al., 2001; Nazar et al., 2019). Previous studies have found a large number of students from Urdu medium schools to be victims of physical punishment both at school and at home (Save the Children UNICEF, 2005). Physical punishment has in some cases resulted in the death of school children in Pakistan (Dawn 2017).

Respondents who scored higher than average on acceptance of violence also scored significantly higher on anxiety, depression, and hostility, and significantly lower on self-esteem. Exposure to violence and witnessing of violence has been shown to be associated with trauma symptoms such as depression, aggression, and distress (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Flannery, Wester, & Singer, 2004). While acceptance of violence was shown to be associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and hostility, this circumstance does not implicate a cause-effect relationship. Other intervening factors such as family background, socio-economic status, or experiences of violence might also be involved in high levels of negative psychological concomitants.

High levels of approval of violence has been shown to be a risk factor for being both a victim and a perpetrator of violence (Spencer et al, 2017). High levels of acceptance of violence among students in Urdu medium schools is a cause of concern, since a large number of Pakistani students join Urdu medium schools due to its affordability. This fact might also be one of the underlying factors contributing to high numbers of incidents of violence in Pakistan. Future studies could investigate the role of socio-economic status and family background in order to explore violence in school setting in Pakistan.

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