

# Ending corporal Punishment of Children: A human rights imperative

**Bess Herbert & Sonia Vohito**  
**End Corporal Punishment**

September  
2024



**End Corporal  
Punishment**



# End Corporal Punishment

## Who we are

- An initiative hosted by the World Health Organization and supported by a multi-partner Advisory Committee
- We support and analyse national progress to end corporal punishment
- Monitor legality and implementation worldwide
- Engage with human rights treaty body systems
- Aim to catalyse progress towards ending all corporal punishment, via universal prohibition and effective implementation

# The problem

## What is corporal punishment?

Corporal punishment is violence against children under the pretext of punishment or discipline

*UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,  
General Comment No. 8, 2006*

- Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light
- Other non-physical forms of punishment can also be cruel and degrading

# The problem

What is corporal punishment...

and why it should be prohibited and eliminated?

- A human rights obligation under the UNCRC and other international and regional instruments
- Very high prevalence and social acceptance
- High cost:

**To the child:** Evidence from research - *'Corporal punishment carries multiple risks of harm and has no benefits'*

**To society:** Huge economic and other costs

# Corporal punishment of children

## Prevalence

The most common and widely accepted form of violence against children

### In the home

- 4 in 5 of all children aged 1-14 years are regularly subjected to violent discipline in their home
- 17% of children suffered severe physical punishment
- 330 million children under five regularly subjected to physical punishment
- 25% of American parents spanked their young children several times a week or more – 17% hit children with an object

# Corporal punishment of children

## Prevalence

### In schools

- A lifetime prevalence of 70% in Africa and Central America, 60% in Eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia
- In 2017-2018 school year more than 69,000 American children were struck at school, many of them multiple times
- Black children and those with disabilities more likely to be subjected to violent punishment in schools
- Corporal punishment remains lawful in schools in 63 UN Member States, including the United States

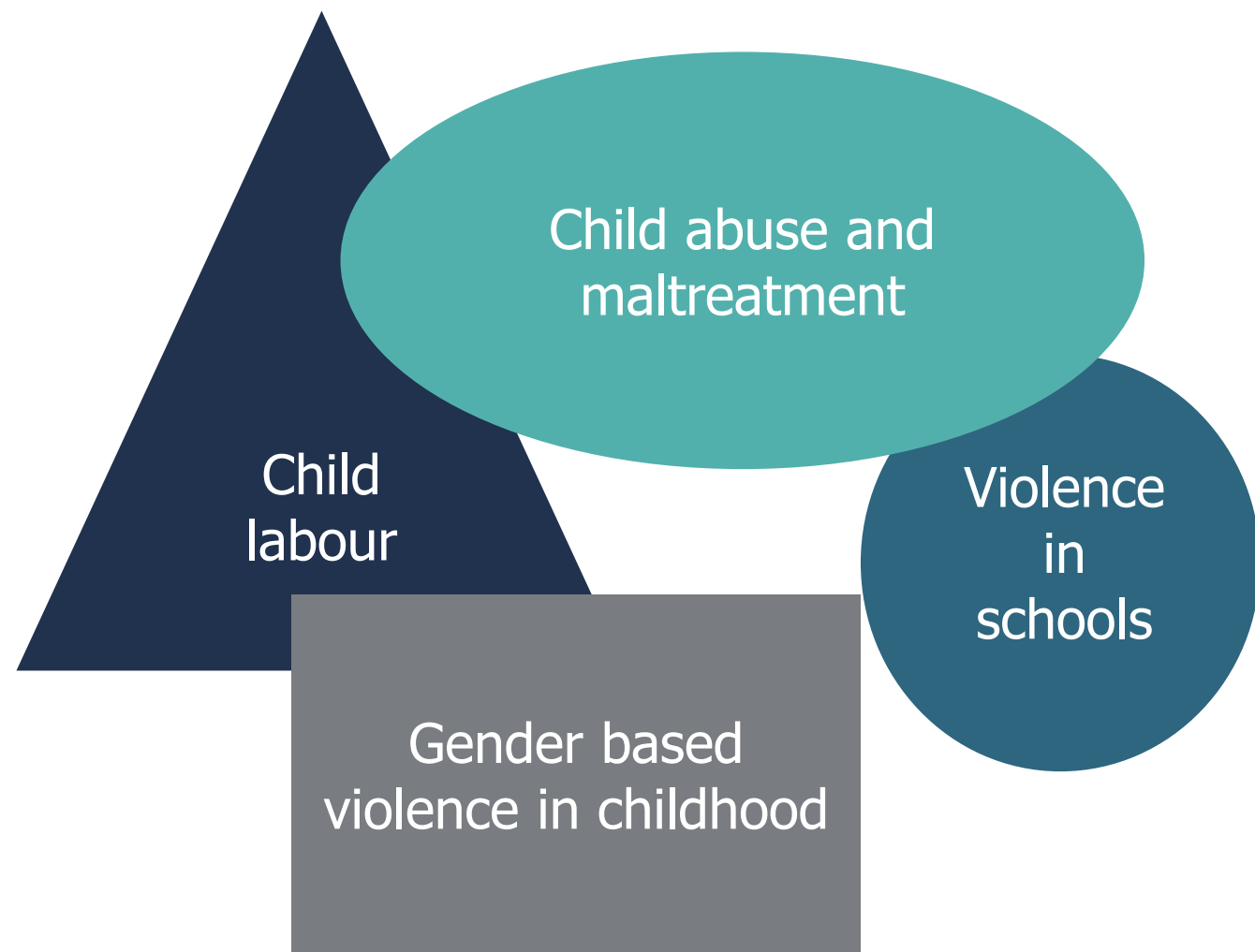
# Corporal punishment of children

## Harmful effects

- Direct and indirect physical harm
- Poorer mental health, including:
  - Increased risk of depression, anxiety, drug/alcohol abuse, suicide, etc.
- Impaired cognitive development and moral internalisation
- Poorer educational outcomes
- Increased aggression and antisocial behaviour
- Adult perpetration of violent, antisocial and criminal behaviour

The legal and social acceptance of corporal punishment

undermines all other efforts to end violence against children



A level of violence in childrearing is legally and socially acceptable



# What is the main aim of prohibiting all corporal punishment of children?

## To uphold children's rights to protection from violence

### Education and prevention

- Sending a clear message that no level of violence in childrearing is acceptable or lawful – develop awareness and understanding, change behaviour

The main purpose of prohibition is not to punish parents and other caregivers

- laws banning corporal punishment should be implemented with children's best interests at the forefront
- no evidence of increased prosecutions of parents and carers where prohibition has been achieved

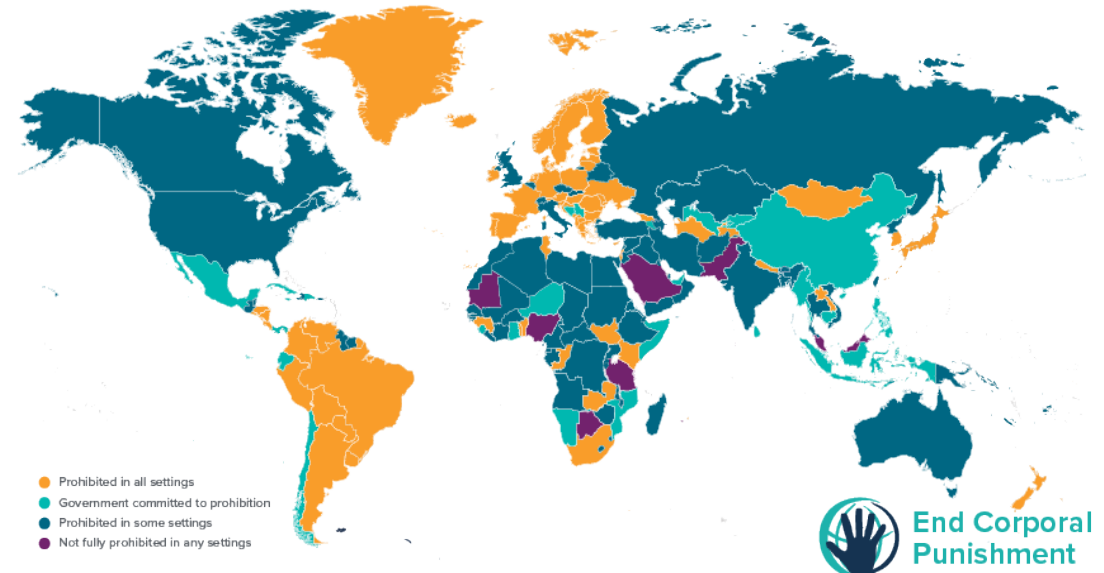
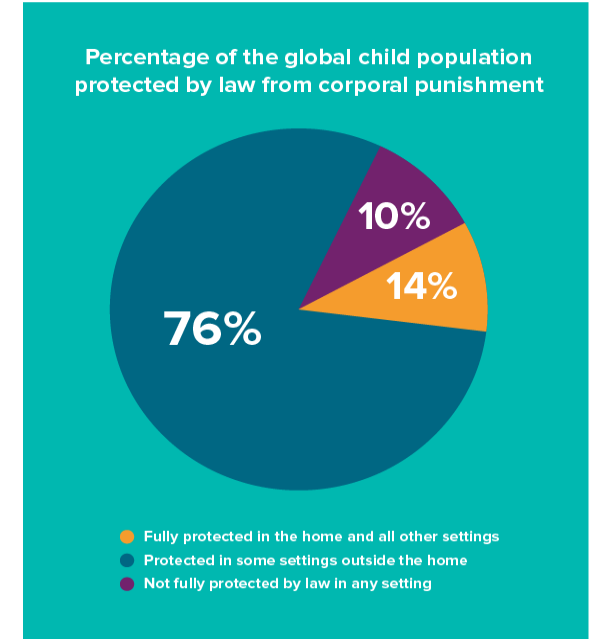
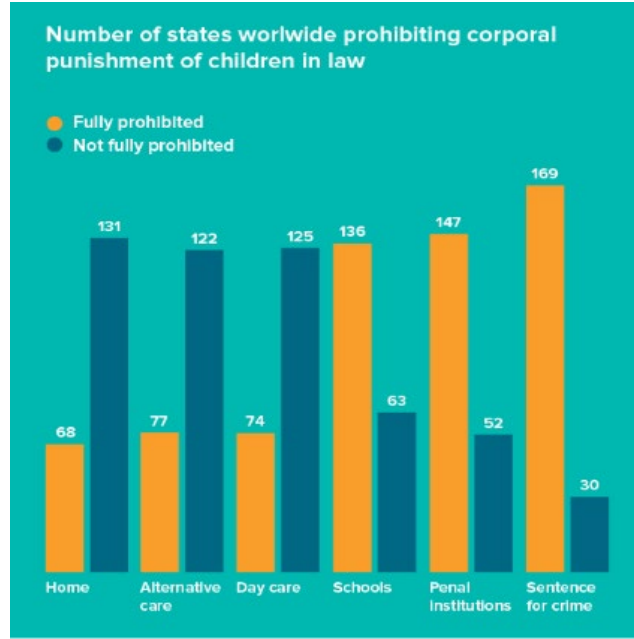
# The response

## Prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment



# Ending corporal punishment

## Global Progress



# Full prohibition of corporal punishment

## Regional Picture

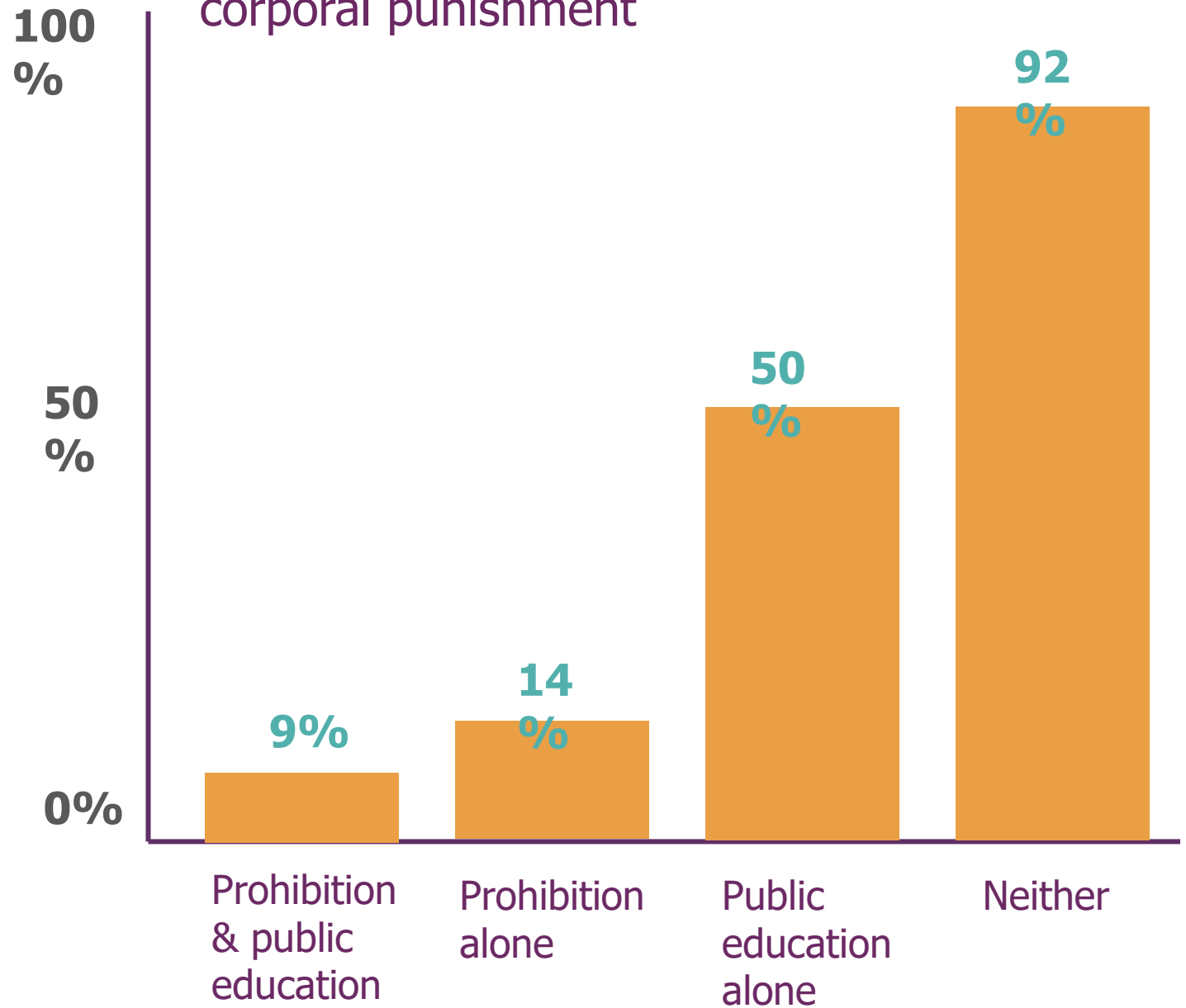
AFRICA	12
ASIA & PACIFIC	6
EUROPE	37
LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN	11
MIDDLE-EAST	1
NORTH AMERICA	0

Most effective strategy for eliminating corporal punishment

Education or law reform?

Effects of banning corporal punishment in Europe: A five-nation comparison.  
Bussman, K.D. & Erthal, C. & Schroth, Andreas. (2011)

Percentage of parents who reported using corporal punishment



# Ending corporal punishment

## Factors assisting in achievement of prohibition

- Political leadership
- Persistent and tenacious campaigners – commitment to issue over decades
- Research/data
- Domino effect and neighbouring countries/states
- Shift in public opinion - desire to move away from violence; to improve care for children; respect for children's rights
- Individual cases of child abuse galvanising public and political opinion
- A window of opportunity – other legal reform; strategic litigation

# Ending corporal punishment

## Factors preventing achievement of prohibition

- Cultural and religious arguments
- Countries with multiple legal systems (secular law; religious law; customary law)
- Countries with federal systems (need for harmonization of federal laws)
- Lack of political leadership/support
- Prohibition is included in controversial law reform/debate (e.g. Definition/age of the child, etc.)

# How is a law prohibiting corporal punishment put into practice?

## Five steps to put prohibition of corporal punishment into practice



### Enact

Adopt a law prohibiting corporal punishment



### Plan and Coordinate

Develop a costed national action plan and Integrate into child protection systems



### Communicate

Public education, awareness raising



### Support

Positive parenting



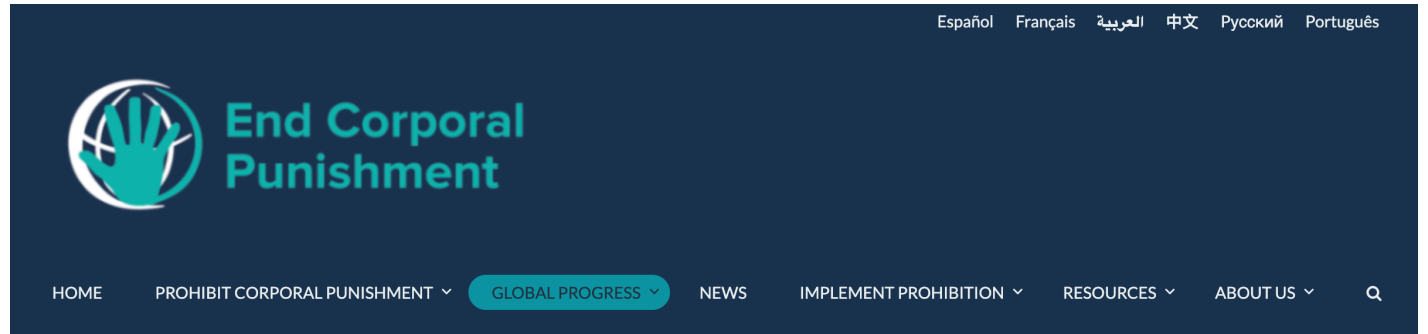
### Evaluate

Monitor the impact of the interventions



# Ending corporal punishment

## A global knowledge hub



Header of the End Corporal Punishment website. It features a dark blue background with the organization's logo (a hand holding a globe) and the text "End Corporal Punishment" in white. The navigation menu includes: HOME, PROHIBIT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, GLOBAL PROGRESS (highlighted), NEWS, IMPLEMENT PROHIBITION, RESOURCES, and ABOUT US. Language options are listed in the top right: Español, Français, العربية, 中文, Русский, and Português.

### Reports on every state and territory

End Corporal Punishment maintains detailed reports on corporal punishment in every state and territory worldwide, setting out the legality of corporal punishment in each setting – the home, alternative care, day care, schools and penal systems – as well as relevant recommendations made under the Universal Periodic Review and by UN and regional treaty bodies, and summaries of recent prevalence or attitudinal research.

We welcome your feedback - please send any comments, updates or corrections to [vohitos@who.int](mailto:vohitos@who.int)

All reports are available in English in the tabs below. Many reports are also now available in the languages listed, and further translations are underway.

- عربي
- ALL LANGUAGES
- ESPAÑOL
- FRANÇAIS
- РУССКИЙ
- 中文
- PORTUGUÊS

### Global progress

- Countdown to universal prohibition >
- States committed to law reform >
- Reports on every state and territory >
- Global progress summaries >
- By region >
- Schools >
- SDGs >
- Girls and gender >
- Migration, conflict and disaster >
- Health >

[www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org)

# Thank you

[herbertb@who.int](mailto:herbertb@who.int)  
[vohitos@who.int](mailto:vohitos@who.int)



End Corporal  
Punishment