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# Corporal punishment in home 'harsh'

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DRUG abuse, alcoholism, dysfunctional behaviour and bullying have been blamed on corporal punishment in the home, and yesterday stakeholders agreed that it was an evil which needed to be rooted out.

Participants in a dialogue on the prohibition of corporal punishment in the home yesterday agreed that corporal punishment perpetuated the cycle of violence, and said it was harsh on children. They said it violated their rights as equal human beings, and that it ultimately created delinquency in adolescents, and aggression in adults.

"Studies have shown that harsh discipline like spanking is associated with depression in adulthood and an increase in condoning violent behaviour," said executive director of the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, Patrick Burton.

During a discussion hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council, he spoke about the evidence of corporal punishment on children at home.

"It reduces moral regulation and reduces empathy," he said, and children who had been spanked at home were twice as likely to use

drugs, and have a positive attitude towards assault, revenge and using force to take goods.

The dialogue defined corporal punishment as any punishment in which physical force was used with the intention of causing some degree of pain or discomfort.

The description was taken from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it said these punishments included hitting, could involve kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing.

Chantal Kissoon, from the South African Human Rights Commission, said society had the responsibility to set unequivocal standards on the rights of the child, and that they were non-negotiable. Children, she said, were inherent rights holders, and had to be treated as such.

Karabo Ngidi argued that the community had to be roped in if a change in respect of children's rights was to be realised.

"Changing legislature and abolishing corporal punishment in the home is not enough, we have to take the community with us," she said.

She spoke of the common law of reasonable chastisement, and said that it created confusion.

"This common-law defence must

be abolished, because it infringes on the child's constitutional right," she said.

Participants agreed on the need to actively involve the community in efforts to ban corporal punishment in the home.

A participant from Mthatha said the community around them had been trained and made aware of alternative methods of discipline, parents had been empowered and it worked very well.

Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference researcher Lois Law said churches had a responsibility to protect children.

"The inter-generational psychosocial impact of violence is evident, and clearly prisons and other forms of correction are not working," she said.

She said children eventually accepted violence as a way of life, and they lived in perpetual fear and had low self-esteem as a result.

"They have a distorted version of what is right and wrong, they turn to gangs for acceptance," she said.

She said that parents who meted out corporal punishment did not deserve to be criticised, but should be supported and given alternative methods of discipline.

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