Punishment and Rewards as a Behaviour Modification Technique on the Learners

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ABSTRACT

School Psychologists believe that severe physical punishment defeats its own purpose by modeling aggressive or physical behaviour, the very behaviour it is often attempting to correct. The work examines punishment and reward as a behaviour modification technique on the learners. Studies have shown that violent punishment can produce aggressive, anxiety, fear, paranoia, apathy, hatred, depression, delinquency and self-destructive behaviours. Adults who were punished violently as children display an increased likelihood of criminal activities, domestic violence, and suicide. Most current promoters of punitive discipline in Nigeria and the United States, however, espouse nonviolent forms of control, or "mild" punishments such as time-out, scolding and disapproval, natural and logical consequences, and penalties (restricting television viewing for example). This work therefore recommends that school psychologists, counsellors, teachers should be trained on use of improve ways of punishment and reward such as token economy, time-out, cognitive behaviour technique, solution focus brief therapy and self management as well as modeling technique be used to readdress problems such as depression, aggression, anxiety and phobic condition of learners.
Keywords: Punishment, rewards, behaviour modification technique, learners

INTRODUCTION

Punishment is often used as synonym for discipline, but the two are not interchangeable. Discipline is a system of actions or interactions intended to create behaviour. Some disciplinary systems use punishment as a tool (Clark, 1989). Therefore, discipline does not always involve punishment, but is sometimes a method of discipline. However, it is the child's interpretation of the punishment that is critical. Punishment can be either physical or nonphysical. Behaviour modification techniques, such as "logical consequences" or "Time out" use rewards and nonphysical punishments to control behaviour (Dianne and Daeg, 2004; 2014). Behaviour modification is sometimes distinguished from punishment with the claim that it is "corrective" rather than "retaliation," but may time a penalty is imposed because of unwanted behaviour (Dobson, 1990), it is punitive. Physical punishments are used frequently in western society, as well elsewhere, despite controversy over their effects (Greven, 1990). Numerous studies have shown that parents, teachers, psychologists,

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religious leaders and others still believe that there is a place for physical punishment (MCcord, 1995; Straus, Richard and Suzanne, 1980). Most current promoters of punitive discipline in the United States (Dianne and Daeg, 2004; Dianne and Daeg, 2014), however, espouse nonviolent forms of control, or "mild" punishments such as time-out, scolding and disapproval, natural and logical consequences, and penalties (restricting television viewing for example). Time out is a behaviour modification technique that has become quite popular in recent years. Used mostly on children between the ages of 2 and 12, it attempts to stop unwanted behaviour by removing the child from all stimulation and attention. A certain room or chair is designed as the "time-out" place, and a child is ordered or carried there whenever he or she engages in a popular unwanted behaviour (Haddan, 1970). Time-out can be effective in modifying disruptive behaviours, like hitting, grapping, talking back, or tantrums. Proponents of behaviour modification claim that the child learns quickly to control his or her own behaviour so as to avoid time-out (Skinner as cited in Bigge and Hunt, 1969). Detractors of punitive discipline argue that external controls do little to change internal motivations or attitudes. Children simply learn to resist or evade external controls.

Another technique of behaviour modification involves "logical consequences". Children often learn not to behave in certain ways through the natural consequences of their actions (Santrock, 2011), such as getting burned when touching a hot stove. Parents and adult caregivers extend that form of learning by arranging consequences to children's actions. To be effective, these arranged consequences must be logically related to the action. For example, if a child does not complete his or her task of washing the dishes one night, the next night he or she must wash double the amount of dishes. Sometimes, natural consequences are too dangerous, so parents arrange logical consequences instead. Child who rides her or his tricycle into the street cannot be allowed to be hit by a car (natural consequences), so instead the parents take the tricycle away from the child for sometime (logical consequences).

Behaviour modification systems of discipline that use "mild" punishment suffer a serious contradiction. However, studies have clearly shown that in order for punishment to be effective it must happen immediately after the behaviour, be severe, and occur every time the behaviour occurs (Dobson, 1990). Nonviolent punitive systems of discipline, on the other hand, recommend that parents should not punish a child in anger (meaning parents must wait until their emotions cool down), and that the punishment be mild. This recommendation negates the first two requirements of effective punishment. The third requirement is impossible to fulfilled, as parents are not constantly present with their children to witness every occurrence of the unwanted behaviour.

Psychologists believe that severe physical punishment defeats its own purpose by modeling aggressive or physical behaviour, the very behaviour it is often attempting to correct. Studies have shown that violent punishment can produce aggression, anxiety, fear, paranoia, apathy, hatred, depression, delinquency, and self-destructive behaviours. Adults who were punished violently as children display an increased likelihood of criminal activities, domestic violence, and suicide (Santrock, 2011). In the light of the above, this work takes a look at punishment and rewards as a behaviour modification technique on the learners.

Punishment and its Consequences

Punishment could be defined as the inflicted of some pain, suffering, loss or some social disability as direct consequences of some action or omission on the part of the person punished. It is an aversive stimulus, whereby an unpleasant or painful, experience is applied in order to discourage a given type of unacceptable behaviour (Raymond, 2008). Two broad categories of punishment have been identified. These are:

a) Positive punishment which involves a stimulus presentation. For example, flogging, asking the offender to fetch water, sweep the classroom or surroundings for a number of days, mild expression or displeasure, angry sarcasm, ridicule or even humiliating remarks.

b) Negative punishment involves stimulus removal. For example, removal of privileges and love, isolation, detention, sending the student out of the class or stopping him to participate in a subject (Santrock, 2011 and Raymond, 2008).

Based on this categorization punishment can be harsh or mild. Harsh or severe punishment may have the following effects:

i.   i.   Make the students to hate the school and their studies as well as the instructor or teacher;

ii.   Make students withdraw and stop trying out things in the class and school;

iii.   Harden some of the students and make them stick to their misbehaviour;

iv.   Make students form bad groups or gangs and plot against school authorities.
       On the other hand, mild and constructive punishment has a satisfying place in the school and classroom. Such a measure may:

i.   Help to maintain order in the classroom.

ii.   Help the students to check their bad behaviour.

iii.   Act as a deterrent to bad behaviour among the students;

iv.   Help teachers and students achieve set classroom objectives (Santrock, 2011; and Raymond, 2008).

Generally, it is believed that punishment does not reduce the frequency of behaviour but does not eliminate it.

Uses of punishment

Punishments serve the following purposes:

i.   Teach the children respect for authority,

ii.   Block undesirable responses and thus reform the offender,

iii.   Force the child to do something he was not ready or did not want to do,

iv.   Serve as a deterrent to potential offenders,

v.   Make students pay attention to class work, and

vi.   Motivate students to learn assigned materials (Santrock, 2011; Raymond, 2008).
       Santrock (2011) and Raymond (2008) maintain that experimental knowledge has shown that the extent of the effectiveness of punishment in eliminating behaviour depends on the following conditions:

Intensity or magnitude of the punishment: The more extreme or harsh the value of punishment is, the more likely the behaviour will be eliminated permanently. Mild levels of punishment may be effective, as serve neither motivated nor well established the disired results. Both levels are informative for the learner, but milder punishment is less likely to result in excessive anxiety, to fixate the undesired behaviour or to be regarded as retaliatory.

Immediacy of punishment: Punishment is affected by the timing of its administration. It is more effective when administered in close proximity to the offence so that the offending student can associate the two. Delay reduces the effectiveness of the punishment because it will suggest reasons other than the offence.

Verbal rationalization: Giving reasons for punishing the child convinces him of the need for the punishment. Verbal reasoning increases the effectiveness of punishment in some situations.

Earlier relations with the punishing agent: When a child is punished by an adult, it may, in addition to the flogging, for instance, involve loss of affection and positive interaction with the adult. Punishment effectiveness depends in part on the relationship between the punishing agent and the recipient of the punishment. The child loss more when punished by a warm, reinforcing adult with whom there is much interaction than with a cold, aloof stranger.

Schedule of punishment: Continuous punishment is more effective than intermittent punishment. The higher the percentage of responses punished, the less frequently punished response will occur. When the same adult sometimes punishes and sometimes reinforces the response, as when a child is sometimes praised and sometimes scolded by the same adult for physical aggression, punishment is effective.

Negative Effects of Punishment
a)   *Negative attitudes and neurotic behaviour:* It has been found that the punished child learns to dislike the punitive agent (teachers or parent), and also the activity (example, subject matter) with which the punishment is associated. Lethargy, anxiety, inability to respond as effects of and phobic reactions have been observed as effects of severe punishment on children.
b)   *Response fixation:* In addition to producing these unwanted outcomes, punishment also may sustain incorrect behaviour. Under certain conditions, punishment may sustain or fixate behaviour rather than eliminate it.
c)   *Imitation:* Children can adopt the patterns of discipline and control displayed by their teachers and parents. A child constantly exposed to punishment is likely to adopt that pattern of interaction in dealing with siblings, peers and others.
d)   A child may learn to avoid punishment rather than for the intrinsic value of the material to be learn.
e)   Punishment leads to fatigue due to tension created by anxiety.
f)   Punishment leads to a disintegration of class morale, that is, it affects the classroom atmosphere (Santrock, 2011 and Raymond, 2008).

Reward as a Behaviour Modification Technique (BMT) on the learners

Rewards are positive reinforcements for good behaviour. They serve as incentives. Rewards may be in form of event, item, idea, stimulus object, situation or verbal statement, which is given for successful completion of a task, service or effort and which is capable of increasing the probability of exhibiting the desired behaviour. Usually, reward is anything that increases the probability of occurrence of a response that come before it. Any stimulus response is a reward or a reinforce; Bigge and Hunt (1969) identify two kinds of reinforcers - "positive" and "negative". A positive reinforcer is any stimulus whose presentation strengthens the behaviour which follows it. For example, the introduction of something –good, water or a smile from teacher into the learner's environment is reinforcing or rewarding. A negative reinforcer is any stimulus the withdrawal of which strengthens that behaviour. Example, an electric shock, teacher's frown, teacher's threat in case of likely misbehaviour and so on. Generally, rewards may have the following effects on students:

i.   They make the students see the recognition for a good act done by them.

ii.   They motivate students to strive to achieve the good act that is rewarded and other act that are likely to be rewarded by the teacher,

iii.   They encourage the recipient to continue to work hard and exhibit good behaviours (Santrock, 2011 and Raymond, 2008).

The timing of reward is very important. Based on timing, two general schedules have been identified (continuous or regular reward and intermittent or partial reward). Continuous or regular reward occurs when reward is provided every time an appropriate response is made. In this case, immediate reward is supplied by the teacher. Such a schedule is best for novel learning or during the acquisition phase when the learner is in the process of learning the correct response. Intermittent or partial reward occurs when the correct response is rewarded but not on every occurrence. Haddan (1970) notes that "an intermittent schedule is resistant to extinction." This suggests that for retention, it is not desirable to reward every response; else it loses its effectiveness. New materials are learned through rewarding each step, even if it is only a small one, which represents progress. Once learning is accomplished, retention is achieved, best by occasional, not regular reward.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Life is a progressive phenomina filled with lots of attributes, attitudes and behaviours. While some of these variables aid healty living, some are injurious to health and should be shown the way out of the system. Among many other forms of handling life inconsistencies is the use of punishment and reward. Hence, while punishment is administered to discourage unhealthy behaviours, rewards provide encouragement and zeal to good behaviour. Studies have shown that violent punishment can produce aggressive, anxiety, fear, paranoia, apathy, hatred, depression, delinquency, and self-destructive behaviours. In the light of the above, it is propose that school psychologists, counsellors and teachers should be trained on use of improve ways of punishment and reward such as token economy, time-out, cognitive behaviour technique, solution focus brief therapy and self management as well as modeling

technique be use to readdress problems such as depression, aggression, anxiety and phobic condition. Learners, caregivers and all stakeholders in education should be sensitized on current trend in punishment and rewards as a behaviour modification technique with great emphasis on their merit and demerit.

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