



An Examination of the Historical and Psychological Perspectives on Physical Punishment in Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*) Education

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Abstract. The implementation of reward and punishment serves as a mechanism of control in society, with Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) constituting a unique community with distinct norms, structures, and relationships. This qualitative library research seeks to provide a historical and psychological perspective on the practice of physical punishment in *Pesantren*. Findings reveal the continued use of physical punishment as an educational tool for students to learn from their mistakes, though its implementation may result in a range of negative psychological consequences, such as decreased motivation to learn, potential depression and discomfort, and the risk of abusive authority in disciplining students, leading to severe trauma.

Keywords: *Pesantren* · Physical Punishment · History · Psychology

1 Introduction

Pesantren, an Islamic educational institution, has a long history in Indonesia. Prior to the emergence of conventional education, *Pesantren* was already established as a place of learning. As an autonomous institution, it has been developed independently of government intervention, which can be seen in its self-sufficient management of assets [1]. The formation of *Pesantren* in the past occurred gradually over several decades, starting as a regular study group or a gathering of individuals interested in studying religion, before evolving into a boarding school. This can be observed in the establishment process of several *Pesantren*, such as Tebuireng *Pesantren*, which initially consisted of a small bamboo-walled house for about eight people to study. The charisma of the *kiai* (religious teacher) determined the pace of the increase in the number of students, which then influenced the expansion of the *Pesantren* buildings according to the number of students. This charisma is not merely based on social status, but also on the depth of spiritual beliefs [2].

Pesantren can be viewed as a society, defined as a group of individuals living together under a certain bond, be it emotional, normative, territorial, and the like. As a community,

Pesantren shares the same bond, which is the religious conviction, and is led by a Kiai who establishes distinctive rules and customs. Similar to other communities, Pesantren has its own system, consisting of regulations, norms, and prohibitions that must be followed. Furthermore, like any social organization, Pesantren employs reward and punishment mechanisms, such as recognition of exemplary behavior and the imposition of various types of punishment to maintain the order and continuity of the system. It is noteworthy that punishment does not necessarily have to be formal, as it can also take informal forms.

In traditional communities, reward and punishment mechanisms are utilized to maintain social order. For instance, individuals who possess skills or talents that are valued by the community are rewarded with various opportunities and recognition, while those who display unsociable behavior are socially sanctioned through gossip and exclusion. These traditional methods of social control differ from the practices observed in educational institutions where punishment is deemed necessary to maintain discipline and enforce rules.

The absence of punishment in educational institutions can render the rules and norms ineffective, leading to potential violations. In educational settings, attendance rules are critical to students' academic success, and their violation can significantly impact learning outcomes. Similarly, in Islamic boarding schools, failure to comply with study requirements can disrupt the learning atmosphere and compromise academic progress. As such, rules and threats are necessary to maintain discipline.

Despite the perceived necessity of punishment in educational institutions, physical punishment is a contentious issue. Teachers often employ non-violent methods such as asking students to stand in front of the class or run around the schoolyard to discipline them. However, more severe punishments such as physical violence using hands have also been reported. Although some argue that punishment is unnecessary, the prevalence of violence in educational settings necessitates ongoing discussion and debate on the most appropriate methods for maintaining discipline while safeguarding students' wellbeing..

There are many negative impacts associated with the practice of physical punishment, not only on the physical level but also on the psychological level. It is crucial to examine the form of physical punishment and its effects on the psyche, and to determine whether such punishment is appropriate or should be upheld in the world of Islamic boarding schools. As the world of Islamic boarding schools is a world of Islamic studies that is related to ethics and etiquette towards others, it is essential to consider the use of physical punishment as a part of their educational method and its long history in the pesantren system.

2 Method

This article will discuss the theme of Physical Punishment in Islamic Boarding Schools from the perspectives of education, history, and psychology. The research methodology used in this study is qualitative research, specifically library research. The data collection technique used is relevant document analysis. The data analysis technique used is Miles and Huberman's content analysis method.

3 Results and Discussions

3.1 Ethics (*Adab*) in Implementing Physical Punishment

As centers of Islamic education, Pesantren follow two sources of guidance: the Quran and the Sunnah. The latter includes the teachings, actions, and decisions of the Prophet Muhammad, which serve as models to be emulated in educating and nurturing individuals. According to various hadiths, the Prophet allowed physical punishment as a means of changing someone's behavior. One hadith states

مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ
يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ وَذَلِكَ
أَضْعَفُ الْإِيمَانِ» رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ.

“Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart - and that is the weakest of faith.” (Muslim Hadith)

In Islam, physical punishment towards children is allowed, but it must be done within an atmosphere of affection and gentleness. Based on various life experiences, individuals often feel close to their fathers and may recall how they were educated. It involved both tenderness and violence, as depicted in anecdotes from the past about parents' interactions with their children.

إِنَّ الرِّفْقَ لَا يَكُونُ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا زَانَهُ وَ مَا
يُنْزَعُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا شَانَهُ

“Verily, gentleness is not found in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disgraces it”. (Muslim Narrated Hadith).

Physical violence in Islam cannot be equated with a harsh and rough temperament. Therefore, the foundation of punishment must also be based on a gentle and compassionate attitude. In another hadith, there are rules regarding physical punishment as a form of discipline:

3.1.1 Prohibition of Striking the Face

إِذَا قَتَلَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلْيَجْتَنِبِ الْوَجْهَ

“If there is a fight between two of you, then refrain from striking the face”. (Muslim Narrated Hadith)

3.1.2 Not Exaggerating in Giving Punishment

As Nash discussed in his essay, it is not advisable to do anything excessively

لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرْعَةِ، إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي
يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ

“The strong person is not measured by their wrestling ability, but rather the strong person is the one who can control themselves when they are angry” (Muttafaquun Alaih)

3.1.3 Not Punishing or Making any Decisions While in a State of Anger

Islam believes that anger is the source of problems, and that anyone can experience anger, including those who claim to be ‘anti-violence’ but often act hypocritically. If someone becomes angry, they may resort to violence. Therefore, in this case, the proper etiquette when angry is to reduce or calm it down, one way of doing so is by changing one’s physical position, such as sitting down if they were standing

وَ إِذَا غَضَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ وَ هُوَ قَائِمٌ فَلْيَجْلِسْ، فَإِنْ
ذَهَبَ عَنْهُ الْغَضَبُ وَ إِلَّا فَلْيَضْطَجِعْ

“And if one of you becomes angry while standing, then let them sit down. The anger will go away, and if not, then let them lie down” (Narrated in Sahih al-Jami’)

Another hadith narrated by Abu Mas’ud Al Badri tells a story of him hitting his slave, and suddenly the Prophet stood near him and said, “Know, Abu Mas’ud, that Allah has more power to do the same to you than you have to do to your slave.” Since then, Abu Mas’ud never hit his slave again. This teaches us that resorting to violence is only permissible in strict circumstances and for the purpose of education (tarbiyah) alone.

These are various etiquettes to be observed before resorting to physical punishment. If all actions are guided by the principles of love and based on mature thinking, then the impact of physical punishment on a child’s psyche would be minimal, preventing it from becoming a negative memory in the future. Such etiquettes should be known by all religious educators, especially those who are involved in administering disciplinary measures (iqab) to students in Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren).

3.2 Historical Background of Ta’zir (Physical Punishment) in Islamic Boarding Schools

Understanding the historical background of physical punishment is important before discussing Ta’zir punishment in Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren). This is because Pesantren is part of a larger society, and various norms and rules that are implemented

in Pesantren are generally applicable elsewhere, with Pesantren developing and implementing them to prepare students according to the demands of the times. Students are expected to be disciplined and comply with the rules in place [3].

The implementation of definite sanctions has been a ubiquitous aspect of human history, serving as a means of threat or deterrence for offenders. Historical evidence from various scholars indicates that physical punishment has been in existence for millennia, including as a method of education. This practice of utilizing physical sanctions as a form of familial education has been observed in both Islamic and Western societies. The concept of habituation, as introduced by Aristotle in antiquity, entails imposing repetitive activities on the subject of education in order to instill desired behavioral patterns and establish habits [4].

Similarly, in boarding school education, the emphasis has always been on habituation. As known, boarding school education existed even before the arrival of Islam in Java. The presence of Candi Sari and Candi Kalasan in Sleman indicates that these places were used by Buddhist monks for religious learning in ancient times. When Islam arrived, the system continued, with Islam not changing the format but only the content. As such, according to some historians, the term “santri” is derived from the Sanskrit word “Sashtri”. The institutions that were later developed, namely Pesantren, did not change the previous format, but only replaced the material [5].

Physical punishment in the boarding school education model in the Nusantara region is not found in ancient manuscripts, as they did not leave complete written records that can be studied in later periods. Only fragments of stories of kings or general descriptions of a Kingdom as depicted in inscriptions or reliefs are found. There is no information on the number of religious leaders, people who studied religious sciences, or what educational models were used.

There is an enduring assumption that the use of physical punishment is an effective method in creating disciplined behavior, thus such punishment methods tend to persist for a long time. The myth of physical punishment being normative leads to it being considered as common and in line with prevailing customs in society [6]. Parents hitting their children is seen as normal, and teachers are perceived to have the same rights as parents in raising children, in accordance with the principle of *in loco parentis*.

The development of Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) has evolved with the passage of time. In the past, individuals did not enroll in Pesantren based on their formal education level, as formal education came later compared to Pesantren. In the early days, seeking knowledge from a kiai (Islamic scholar) did not involve registration or official administrative fees as it does now. In the past, one did not need to live in the boarding school (pondok) if their house was close to a knowledgeable kiai. Pondokos were established after several students from distant areas expressed a desire to seek knowledge from a particular kiai. As a result, there were resident students (santri mukim) and non-resident students (santri kalong) [7]. During this pioneering period, rules and regulations, let alone a list of sanctions, were not yet considered.

The existence of Pesantren is believed to have originated during the time of Walisongo, who spread Islam in Java. How the early ulama (Islamic scholars) managed Pesantren is not clearly known, except from accounts of senior ulama who had studied under previous scholars. Empirical evidence of the existence of Pesantren can be found

in the form of historical remains. In Java, there is an inscription indicating the establishment of a Pesantren in Somalangu village, Kebumen, dating back to 1475. There is also Pesantren Luhur Dondong in Semarang, which is approximately 400 years old, around the same time as the Demak Kingdom. In Madura, there is Pesantren Nazhatuth Thulab established in 1702, and in Cirebon, there is Pesantren Ciwaringin founded in 1705. Pesantren Imogiro itself was established in 1745 [7].

It is not known what kind of sanctions were given by the founders of Pesantren in the past, apart from testimonies. Many testimonies are given about the nurturing methods of Kiai Zarkasyi in Ponorogo, Kiai Hasyim in Jombang, Kiai Cholil in Bangkalan, and Kiai Munawwir in Yogyakarta. As with human tendencies, there were likely cases of students violating Pesantren rules, and each founder had their own way of handling them. One guiding principle is to avoid imposing sanctions beyond the limits [5].

The implementation of Ta'zir (disciplinary punishment) in Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) has a historical journey. The physical punishment in Pesantren generally does not have any specific provisions. Usually, the party that decides the punishment weighs what punishment is appropriate for the mistake committed by the santri (students). It is not systematically recorded that a santri who skips studying (ngaji) will receive this punishment, while those who attend prohibited events in Pesantren will receive that punishment. In fact, some Pesantren do not have a specific institution to implement such punishments.

In the past, Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari in Jombang once implemented punishment on a santri. At that time, near the Pesantren, there was a kenduren (festive event) that did not align with the values of the boarding school. So KH Hasyim Asy'ari prohibited the santri from leaving the Pesantren and attending the event. Kiai Hasyim threatened that anyone caught attending the event would be punished by having to kiss the buttocks of a cow. Because the event was very appealing, especially considering the time, there were santri who attended it. Kiai Hasyim himself "interrogated" the related santri. Since he didn't know what to do with the santri, he said, "It's up to you to decide what punishment to give. I don't know, I leave it to the other santri." Then the santri was carried by a group of people to the back of a cow. [8] This is an example of the implementation of physical punishment for santri. Usually, the implementation of this punishment depends on how the Pesantren's management carries it out.

The punishments also vary depending on the development of Pesantren. Salaf Pesantren (which does not require students to attend formal school) certainly has different rules. Pesantren in the past that did not yet know about kitab (Islamic texts) were different from the time after Syaikh Nawawi Al Bantani introduced the Ika iku utawi method as a way of reading kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts). Because the possession of kitab kuning as a means of teaching and learning was essential in Salaf Pesantren. Someone who did not participate in studying with the kiai (Islamic scholars) would find it difficult to obtain a ngaji (Islamic study) certificate from the kiai. Because in the tradition of Salaf teaching, the satisfaction (ridha) of the kiai is very important in determining whether someone passes or not. A santri (student) who frequently violates the rules is considered to have a lack of barakah (blessings) in their knowledge, and as a result, they will be avoided by other santri. This is the most widely circulated story about punishments around Salaf Pesantren [9].

The punishments also depend on the type of pesantren. Modern pesantren and Salaf pesantren have different rules, and the way they punish students also differs. Salaf pesantren usually are more lenient in giving disciplinary sanctions (iqab) to students compared to modern pesantren. Salaf pesantren usually advise students if their offense is simply skipping religious studies (mbolos mengaji). Then they give stern warnings if the offense is considered to have crossed the line. Advising and warnings are usually done by the village head or ustadz, rarely (or even never) directly by a Kiai (Islamic scholar). If a Kiai directly admonishes, then the behavior of the related student will receive attention from other students in general. However, this also depends on the person and the regulations. In a pesantren, there are also regulations that detail the offenses and the corresponding punishments.

When implementing punishments, pesantren also follow the existing system in the pesantren. In modern pesantren, such as Pesantren Gontor, the responsibility for the discipline of boarding students is entrusted to the qismur ri'ayah (guardianship division). This guardianship division consists of the asatidz (teachers), who structurally oversee the student organization underneath them. The qismur ri'ayah is not directly involved in enforcing daily discipline in the boarding school, but they delegate authority to the structure below them, which is the student organization management (OPPM). The OPPM members are usually selected from senior students (usually from Classes 5 and 6 of KMI) and are officially appointed and entrusted with responsibilities every year [9].

This organization has various departments within it. Such as the Security Department (Qismul Amn) to ensure that all students do not violate discipline in the boarding school. The Language Department (Qismul Lughoh) to ensure that students adhere to the discipline of foreign languages (Arabic & English) every day. The Sanitation Department (Qismun Nazhofah) to ensure that all students maintain cleanliness and actively participate in environmental cleanliness in the boarding school. Therefore, if there are students who violate these rules, the relevant department will take disciplinary action. [10]

Since its inception, Pesantren Darussalam Gontor has implemented these rules. This boarding school was established in 1926 and has inspired similar boarding schools, bringing the Gontor system to the boarding schools established by its alumni. In the city of Solo, there is a similar system in place in Pesantren As Salam and Pesantren Ta'mirul Islam. This developed system is different from the system used in salaf boarding schools, which generally use the 'lurah' model. In Pesantren Ta'mirul Islam itself, there is an organization called OSTI (Organization of Ta'mirul Islam Students) which is a replication of OPPM (Organization of Modern Islamic Education) in Gontor.

In this model, there are penalties for language violations. A student who is caught not using Arabic (or English) will be called by the Language Department and given sanctions. Whether the sanctions involve physical punishment or not depends on the policy of the person giving the sanctions. These individuals usually have less control and are given freedom to determine the type of punishment. If they are not in a good mood, they may impose very harsh punishments, while a more patient administrator may impose relatively lighter punishments. This creates a distinct relationship pattern between students (seniors and juniors). Juniors are expected to always obey seniors, so they must strictly adhere to all the rules of the boarding school. Seniors, on the other

hand, have more leeway. This model does not apply to the management of Salaf boarding schools, which entrust the care to the appointed 'lurah' directly by the Kiai.

The 'lurah' in Salaf boarding schools is different. The 'lurah' of the boarding school is a senior student, relatively older but not married. A 'lurah' acts as an extension of the Kiai, whose main task is to ensure that the activities of the boarding school are carried out according to the Kiai's instructions. There is no formal division of tasks, but the 'lurah' is directly accountable to the Kiai. The 'lurah' of the boarding school also has the task of collecting fees from the students and giving punishments to students who violate the rules. They prefer to be cautious, prioritizing advice, reprimands, and warnings, and rarely resorting to physical punishment. Because leadership in Salaf boarding schools is simple, the sanctions are informal, democratic, and the 'lurah' serves as the liaison between the Kiai and the students [11].

In modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), physical punishments are developed, such as shaving the head of the students, asking them to stand in place, run, or do push-ups (physical punishments in the form of exercise), hitting specific body parts with a cane, cleaning bathrooms, etc [12]. The severity and frequency of these sanctions depend on the mindset of the school administrators. In more flexible pesantren cultures, physical punishments may not be as strict as in other pesantren. For example, in cases of dating, a student can be immediately expelled, as has happened in some cases in Pesantren Mahasiswa Unida Ponorogo. However, similar mistakes may only result in a reprimand in other pesantren, depending on the system established by the pesantren itself. In one pesantren, a student may be slapped for being caught watching a movie, while in another pesantren, they may be forcibly shaved bald. The tendency for physical punishment has decreased in recent years compared to decades ago.

However, there are still some cases in some pesantren where students are subjected to physical mistreatment [12]. If this occurs, it indicates an excessive abuse of authority. For example, if someone who has been given authority to impose sanctions on students abuses it, even to the point of cruelty. What if the person given authority lacks maturity in thinking and acting? Some pesantren appoint senior students (who are still teenagers) to handle disciplinary matters for their junior classmates. This practice is prone to abuse of power. Therefore, the psychological well-being of vulnerable teenagers should be a concern for pesantren educators.

Cases of violence in the educational system also occur in the Institute of Domestic Governance (IPDN). Incidents resulting in death have been repeatedly recorded. This is because seniors impose sanctions without considering the physical impact. Even emotional punishment without physical force can harm the body, resulting in the death of students. This also happens in some pesantren in Indonesia. Due to a lack of understanding about physical conditions and the fragile psychological state of those who impose punishment, serious consequences can occur for students.

Violence in pesantren can occur due to a lack of control over the perpetrators. For example, the religious teachers or Kiai may not adequately supervise how senior students treat their junior counterparts. In general, they simply trust senior students to punish their junior counterparts with relatively loose supervision. Although in formal pesantren protocols, there is a "supervision model" where all activities of students are always monitored and controlled by different departments of the pesantren [13].

Violence can also occur due to the power imbalance when dealing with individuals who have greater physical strength and authority. Examples of sexual violence by Herry Wirawan and sexual harassment in Pesantren Shiddiqiyah, as well as cases of sexual violence in Selamat Pagi Malang Foundation School, indicate a lack of control that can lead to abuse of power, resulting in physical or sexual violence.

3.3 The Impact of Physical Punishment on Children's Psychological Well-Being

Physical punishment is a deliberate act of causing unpleasantness to another person as a form of education [14]. Actions that are unintentional or done by someone who is not in good health and cause harm are not considered as punishment. Similarly, physical harm inflicted during a fight is not considered as “punishment” because punishment has a purpose, which is education. Making someone fearful so that they do not repeat their mistakes is also part of the educational process, although it may not be favored by some parties.

There are pros and cons among education experts regarding physical punishment. On one hand, some consider it an effective tool to instill good behavior in children. As mentioned before, societal norms also accept physical punishment towards children. For example, if a child is caught climbing onto the roof of their neighbor's house, what should the parents do? If the parents allow it or only give a “small warning” to the child, it may be seen as condoning the behavior.

On the other hand, some believe that physical punishment is only effective in the short term but not in the long term. Strauss argued that children who are consistently subjected to physical punishment may respond with more aggressive behavior [15]. Moreover, based on observations, alumni who have experienced violence generally exhibit normal behavior in public. They may have families and do not act aggressively, as is typical in society. However, they tend to distance themselves from or hold grudges against those who had previously subjected them to violence during their adolescence.

According to other experts, when viewed from another perspective, physical punishment can have positive effects. Because the “violence” serves as a deterrent to certain behaviors, it is continuously ingrained in the subconscious mind, and this will provide warnings for the future [16]. When children are taught to speak politely to adults from a young age, this habit can carry over into adulthood. This approach is similar to the approach used by behaviorist psychologists, where continuous stimulation of an object results in long-lasting behavior in the future. The existence of the reward and punishment approach in society is evidence that punitive actions have positive impacts on social cohesion.

The problem that arises here is the issue of physical punishment towards students. There are several negative impacts, such as children learning physical violence, experiencing trauma, and facing learning difficulties [17].

3.3.1 Children Learn Physical Violence

Anti-physical violence is one of the indicators of religious moderation. This indicator of religious moderation is socialized by the Department of Religion at all levels of schools, madrasahs, and pesantrens. Therefore, physical violence should be eliminated based on

the regulations of the Ministry of Religion [18]. Pesantrens need to reevaluate the practice of iqab (physical punishment) that is given. Because apart from being inconsistent with the direction of the Ministry of Religion's goal of promoting moderation, it is also inconsistent with the psychological development of children. When teenagers are emotionally vulnerable, they may exhibit various forms of violence. As a result, children become accustomed to violence. Because if violence is frequently displayed, they will become accustomed to it.

3.3.2 Learning Disorders

Learning disorders may arise after students receive iqab punishment. They may feel pressured and sometimes experience a lack of self-confidence after iqab. Some may feel offended by what the seniors have done to them, causing them to lose motivation in studying. This is especially challenging in pesantren where memorization is a significant part of the curriculum.

3.3.3 Trauma

Trauma is an emotional response to unpleasant or negative events. Trauma can vary in its severity, including chronic trauma, acute trauma, and complex trauma. Symptoms of trauma also vary. However, cases of chronic traumatic experiences due to physical punishment in pesantren are rare, except for cases of sexual violence. The most common form of depression is withdrawal of students who no longer feel comfortable continuing their life in pesantren due to the severity of the punishments.

Other impacts include physical injuries from violence or phobias, which are rarely found, except in extreme cases with very small proportions. For example, due to negligence by a caretaker or senior student, there was a case in a pesantren where a student died not because of the punishment itself, but because the caretaker felt offended by the junior student's reaction and kicked their chest, resulting in their death. Similar to cases of fights among students resulting in death. Cases of student deaths due to punishment are due to abuse of authority by senior students [19].

4 Conclusion

The practice of physical punishment in pesantren has existed since ancient times. This is because traditionally, physical punishment is believed to be effective in shaping character. This belief is supported by the ability of someone to implement physical punishment according to fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Although there are limitations in fiqh regarding the implementation of physical punishment, such as it should not be excessive.

The development of systems in pesantren allows for various forms of punishment. For example, there are mandatory rules for attending school, using foreign languages, possessing certain books, and so on. There are rules, and there are sanctions. The severity of the sanction depends on the severity of the student's offense. Physical punishment is administered if a student violates a serious rule. However, the manner of punishment depends on the discretion of the punisher according to their interpretation.

Physical punishment can have psychological impacts if it exceeds reasonable limits. Excessive physical punishment can cause chronic and severe trauma. It can also result in learning disorders, depending on a student's response to the punishment. If the punishment is perceived as too severe, it can lead to depression and eventually requests to leave the pesantren. Therefore, pesantrens need to have stricter supervision over the mechanism of punishment to prevent excessive and severe physical violence.

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Author's Contributions. The recommendations from the results of this research are directed towards educational institutions in Indonesia, both public and private schools, with a special focus on Pesantren as an Islamic educational institution that operates for a full 24 h. Educational institutions should equip every educator with the basic values of punishment, from understanding religious rules to the psychological impacts, which should be deeply understood by every educator.

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