

Voices of the Community

EXPLORING ATTITUDES TOWARDS PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT
AMONG AFRICAN COMMUNITIES IN GREATER MANCHESTER

An AFRUCA Community Research Project
September 2018

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This is our third report in our series of “Voices of Community”



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ABOUT AFRUCA

AFRUCA was established in May 2001 to promote the rights and welfare of Black and African children in the UK. Our Head Office is in London. We run a Centre for African Children and Families in Manchester. We also run projects working with African communities across England.

AFRUCA work in five key areas:

- Awareness Raising and Sensitisation
- Information, Education, and Advisory Services
- Advocacy and Policy Development
- Community and International Development
- Support for Children, Young People and Families

AFRUCA works nationwide with different local authorities in the assessment of safeguarding cases which involve parents of African origin. Our work focuses on assessing the cultural and trans-cultural issues involved in cases, the impact on families trying to navigate different cultures as well as the behavioural impact on their children. AFRUCA works to support such parents to learn new skills which would enable them to better parent their children, provide a loving and nurturing environment and prevent abuse and harm.

AFRUCA also provides training on cultural intelligence for practitioners working with children and families to enable a better understanding of key cultural issues that might affect the safeguarding of children.

AFRUCA runs a range of programmes and services across England and in partnership with others across Europe and in Africa to help enhance the safeguarding of Black and African children.

For further information about our work, visit www.afruca.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There is a growing number of children from African communities being referred into child protection systems under the category of physical abuse. From our experience, this is not just across Greater Manchester but seems to be a national trend in areas with a growing numbers of African families.
- Most African parents love their children and want the best outcomes for them. The use of physical chastisement to instil discipline in children is regarded as both a cultural and religious child-rearing practice to build moral values, strong character and respect for others. For most parents, this is how they were raised as children back home in Africa. However, within the context of UK laws, this practice can unwittingly lead to children being abused and harmed.
- Parents recognise the long and short term harm to children posed by physical chastisement, which overrides any usefulness or benefits of this form of parenting. This requires that parents are supported to gain and employ new tools to enable them to achieve the above outcomes without breaking the law or putting children at risk of harm.
- The principles of “reasonable chastisement” as enshrined in Section 58 of the Children Act of 2004 is ambiguous and subjective. Many parents report being confused in relation to what they can or cannot do under this legislation. Non-contact physical chastisement like stress positions harm children but theoretically do not fit the definition of reasonable chastisement. There are a number of grey areas which can lead to a lack of effective protection for children in ethnic communities, including African communities.
- There is a lot of pressure on African women on whom the bulk of child upbringing depends, with little or no support from partners and agencies. Women caught up in domestic violence situations are especially vulnerable, and can unwittingly put their children at risk of harm as a result of their own emotions and experiences.
- Some parents feel alienated by schools, especially when there is limited language capacity to communicate effectively. This prevents an effective joint-working by both schools and parents to intervene as early as possible when issues occur, which can lead to parents taking extreme measures in the home to address the situation.
- Some parents feel that their language difficulties prevent them from effective communication with their children, leading to physical chastisement as a key mode of communicating with them.
- Some cases of physical chastisement might have other underlying causes including domestic violence and the branding of children as witches. It is possible that a lack of cultural understanding by practitioners means such cases are misdiagnosed or are totally missed.
- There is a strong role for faith organisations to become strong channels of support for parents to better understand religious concepts about child discipline and provide opportunities for training on child protection for faith workers and members of the congregation
- The impact of physical chastisement on children is well recognised by most participants. Many participants also have strong ideas of alternative tools to use in place of beating or smacking. The challenge for agencies is how to work closely with parents to help change behaviour in the best interests of children.
- Local authority child protection workers in areas with a high proportion or a growing number of ethnic communities need to improve their capacities to intervene successfully in families by gaining new skills in cultural intelligence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Prevention and Early Intervention Approaches

- There is a clear-cut case to be made for strengthening prevention and early intervention approaches by local authorities in order to address many of the issues raised in this report. Many parents need to understand the differences in the law in relation to child protection between many African countries and England and the statutory role that exists for local authority intervention in families. Stronger efforts to propagate knowledge on the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishments by such families is equally essential. Early intervention approaches are important so that work is done with vulnerable families before abuse occurs and outside child protection legal systems.

- In particular, faith groups are an important link in prevention efforts and work with them to strengthen child protection practices needs to be prioritised.

- We therefore recommend that local authorities place more emphasis on prevention and early intervention approaches to help reduce the incidences of abuse towards children; in this case physical abuse and African children.

Training in Cultural Intelligence

- It is critical for practitioners who work with African families (and other new communities) to gain the important knowledge and understanding of cultural practices and how this can impact on parenting and child protection. Cultural intelligence means being able to navigate different cultures and work successfully across cultural boundaries. Training on cultural intelligence should be mandatory for all practitioners working in areas with a high or growing population of people from diverse communities.

- More specifically, practitioners need to better understand how safeguarding issues like domestic violence and the branding of children as witches or as possessed by evil spirits can lead to children being physically abused. Without a deep knowledge of the cultural factors involved, a wrong assessment can be made to the detriment of the child. We therefore recommend that agencies prioritise knowledge and understanding of these key subjects for their staff, via accredited training programmes by specialist organisations.

Schools and Parents: A Partnership Approach

- Schools are usually the first point of contact for parents and children. It is important that schools can act as channels of support for struggling families, helping to navigate the systems and facilitating access to support on parenting issues. This will help to ensure stressors at home do not escalate to the detriment of the child.

Closer Links With Specialist Charities and Community Organisations

- Specialist charities working with families from diverse communities like AFRUCA are a huge source of knowledge and intelligence for practitioners and policy-makers and can help to inform local decision-making in relation to “what works” for local agencies. It is critical that they are well engaged to help strengthen local intervention in communities for effective changes to occur.

It Should Be Illegal To Smack or Beat Children

- There is some confusion amongst parents about the notion of reasonable chastisement and what this means for child discipline. Many parents have fallen foul of the law because of their strong belief that smacking or beating children is a cultural or religious undertaking which must be adhered to in the best interests of children. However, evidence shows there are many alternatives to beating children that work equally well. This negates the need to beat children in the name of discipline. We therefore ask that this practice is made illegal in England.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW OF PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

1. Our direct experience at AFRUCA shows an increasing number of children of African origin across Greater Manchester being removed from families as a result of Physical Abuse. This mirrors the experiences of other child protection agencies across the region where referrals involving children of African origin typically including “beatings” or excessive forms of physical chastisement are on the increase.

2. Whereas parenting in African homes is generally known to be nurturing, protective and supportive, conversely, the issue of physical punishment is regarded as prevalent among families of African origin, both here in the UK and in Africa itself. Many first generation Diaspora parents grew up in environments where the notion of “good home training” and “discipline” were the basis of child upbringing. This is not only based on the culture but also the religious beliefs and practices of parents. These practices are seen as ‘normal’ by many Africans but could be regarded as posing significant harm to children, based on UK child protection laws.

3. Parents and faith leaders could be unaware of UK laws on child protection and those practices that are aimed at child safeguarding. AFRUCA believes the above reasons are responsible for the increase in the number of children removed from families and placed into the care system, leading to family fragmentation.

4. This is one of few research projects done in the UK looking at attitudes towards physical chastisement among African families in England. For us at AFRUCA, it was important, in carrying out this piece of work, to establish from parents themselves why they resort to this form of discipline as part of their parenting techniques.

5. We wanted to find out how much parents were aware of current UK legislation around child protection, what parents knew about alternative ways of disciplining children without resorting to physical abuse. We also wanted to find out from parents how they thought they could be supported to learn alternative approaches to enable them to parent their children appropriately without contravening the law. This research focused on key communities in Greater Manchester who are of African origin including Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda/Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, Congo DR, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

1.2.1 AFRUCA'S WORK WITH FAMILIES IN GREATER MANCHESTER

6. In the past few years, the family support and assessment service at AFRUCA has grown significantly. This is due to the high number of referrals received from local authorities across the country. Many of these cases involve complex case-work with families in care proceedings. In the financial year 2017 to 2018, 66% of all cases received were in Care Proceedings, while 26% involved children on Child Protection Plans. Majority of the cases dealt with (75%) have involved families where the issue of physical chastisement has been the key factor in local authority intervention. Added to that is the increasing number of case work involving branding children as witches (3%) which typically includes physical abuse. 55% of the cases referred to AFRUCA during this financial year have come from Manchester City Council – more than half of all casework, with other Greater Manchester authorities including Trafford, Tameside and Oldham also regularly referring cases to AFRUCA.

7. AFRUCA recognises that prevention and early intervention efforts will go a long way to help address this problem. For this reason, it has worked across Greater Manchester to provide basic child protection training to African communities to enable better understanding of child protection rules and provide information on alternatives to physical chastisement. With funding from agencies including the Big Lottery Fund and the Henry Smith Foundation, we have trained over 5000 parents across the region over the past four years. We have also produced specialist safeguarding publications widely disseminated across faith and community groups across Greater Manchester. These include our very popular publication: “Child Protection Manual for African Parents in England”, and our series of publications: “The Safeguarding African Children in the UK” series. We have also launched a pilot “Schools Intervention Programme” in Manchester enabling us to provide one-to-one advice and support to newly arrived families in the school environment. With these activities, we aimed to help address child protection issues before problems occur, improve knowledge and understanding of what it means to protect children from different forms of abuse and harm and provide parents with new tools to improve parenting so there is less need to physically chastise children – which can lead to conflict with the law.

8. However, it is clear from AFRUCA's direct work with families which includes training, support, assessment and rehabilitation by our Social Work team that further work needs to be done to better understand this phenomenon. At the same time, it is essential that such learning can be employed to help support local authority social work practitioners in their efforts intervening in families. Furthermore, a better understanding of this phenomenon will help local authorities themselves to be better able to put in place prevention and early intervention programmes of support for families to help reduce the occurrence of physical abuse and enable better child safeguarding (Working Together To Safeguard Children 2018 page 13). This research project was therefore conducted to help achieve better outcomes for children.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

9. This research project aimed to explore the attitudes towards physical chastisement among African families in Greater Manchester. It also sought to:

- establish parents rationale for use of physical chastisement as part of their parenting techniques;
- explore parents' knowledge and awareness of current UK legislation on child protection and smacking children;
- establish parents' knowledge and use of alternative ways of disciplining children without physical chastisement;
- explore how parents can be supported to take up different approaches to parenting without using physical chastisement.

1.4 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

10. This qualitative study involved conducting focus group sessions held with 10 different community groups and organisations across Greater Manchester between November 2017 and June 2018. One additional focus group was held with young adults either born in the UK to first generation African parents or raised in the UK from a very young age. A total number of 192 participants took part of which 164 were females (85%) and 28 were males (15%). This enabled us to gather rich data directly from affected communities.

11. A tailor-made questionnaire was used during each session to ensure similar questions were asked in all focus group discussions (see Annex One). Some participants from the focus groups also filled in an individual questionnaire to capture individual responses.

12. We also conducted desk research to explore key policy and practice issues in relation to physical chastisement in the UK and AFRUCA's ongoing work with African families on this subject. Chapter Two of this report focuses on the outcomes of the desk research.

1.5 CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

13. While we are thankful to all the communities who took part in this study, AFRUCA faced many constraints in carrying out this research project.

14. As the practice of physical chastisement is normally done within the confines of the home, we felt that some parents/carers did not want to expose themselves. It therefore appeared to us that individual acknowledgements of the practice and prevalence of this form of managing children's behaviour were not very outright. Furthermore we got the sense that some communities did not want to be labelled as "child abusers". We felt that this put a limitation on what participants were able to discuss even in a general discussion.

15. Language was a barrier for some communities and this limited full participation. For communities that struggled with speaking fluent English, we had to use interpreters and in most of these it was almost impossible to use individual questionnaires to capture individual responses. Again, this limited the amount of information gathered from such groups and it was difficult to qualify the information received as reliable.

16. Another constraint was in relation to availability of time to expand outreach for this research. We could only reach and mobilise few communities in the available time-frame. It is therefore important to note that despite working with the mentioned communities, the numbers involved were limited and the views collected may not be representative of the wider community.

17. Where some of the participants acknowledged the use of physical punishment / chastisement on their children within their communities, they were not ready to elaborate especially in regards to their own cultural attitudes towards it. For this reason, some of the group responses we received may not really reflect the wider extent of the problem.

18. Lack of reliable statistics of actual population limited outreach and identification of target communities. Most of the study participants were female, making male representation very limited. We were unable to reach more young adults to capture their experiences and attitudes again due to time constraints.

19. Lastly, there was the limitation of cultural/ethnicity bias. There was a generic view across the focus groups that African parents have been labelled as abusive for being too strict with their children or using physical chastisement to an extent that some fear admitting to smacking their children.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT IN AFRICAN FAMILIES

2.1 DEFINING PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT

1. Physical chastisement is the use of physical force towards a child by a person in a position of authority or power over the child's misconduct with intent of preventing or modifying child's behaviour (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). The use of physical chastisement on children by parents appears to be commonly practised across the world. In African communities, many people regard physical chastisement as a reasonable and effective way to teach respect, prohibit "sinful" behaviour, safeguard their children from negative peer pressure, crime and criminality, and encounters with racism in the community they live (AFRUCA: What is Physical Abuse, 2018 page 6). Invariably, the practice of physical chastisement has led to many African parents across England becoming involved with child protection services, leading to children being removed from their families and placed into local authority care (AFRUCA: Manual On Child Protection for African Parents in the UK 2018).

2. There are many forms of physical abuse, whether contact or non-contact based. From our experience at AFRUCA, these can range from beating, hitting, stress positions, putting objects like chilli pepper in the eyes or other parts of the body, burning with cigarette stubs, hot water or hot iron, force feeding, putting marks or incisions on the body, withholding food over an extended period of time as well as forcing children to under-take excessive and hazardous labour. These acts can put children at risk of significant harm, leading to intervention by local authority child protection agencies in order to safeguard children at risk (AFRUCA: What is Physical Abuse 2018, page 8). Barn and Kirton in Bernard and Harris 2016 page 117 highlight that the particular focus on physical abuse has centred on the propensity of Black parents to use "excessive" corporal punishment, meaning that other forms of physical abuse have received little attention.

2.2 AFRICAN CHILDREN AND OVER-REPRESENTATION IN CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

3. According to published government statistics, in 2016-2017, there were 51,080 children on a Child Protection Plan in England (Department for Education 2018: Characteristics of Children in Need 2016-2017: Main Table A5). 167,670 children were subject to Section 47 inquiries within the same period (Table A2). Generally, across England, Neglect and Emotional Abuse were the main reasons that all children referred were put on a Child Protection Plan in 2016-2017 (Table A6). Out of the 2600 Black or Black British children on a Child Protection Plan during this period, 391 were under the category of Physical Abuse (Table A5). (Government statistics does not sub-categorise these children, for example as African, due to low numbers or to protect confidentiality). The overall number of children on a Plan under the category of Physical Abuse is 3950 (Table A5). This means that roughly 10% of this figure (391) are Black children. However, it should be pointed out that there were more Black children under the categories of Neglect (998) and Emotional Abuse (950), than Physical Abuse (391). The high numbers of Black children under the two categories of Neglect and Emotional Abuse are equally concerning and call for further investigation. However they are not the subject of this research.

4. What presently concerns us at AFRUCA is the disproportionality in the figures when compared with other national data. According to the 2011 Census figures, Black children form 3% of the total number of children in England (ONS) but form 10% of children on a Child Protection Plan under the category of Physical Abuse, as highlighted above.

5. This is also a growing trend. Figures for Black children on Child Protection Plans have remained fairly constant since 2014, with a slight reduction in 2017 as shown in the table below:

Table One: Black Children on Child Protection Plans: Physical Abuse 2014-2017

2014	2015	2016	2017
430	440	440	391

(Source: Department for Education)

6. There are many reasons put forward for this seemingly “over-representation” of Black children in the system. Barn and Kirton in Bernard and Harris 2016 page 116 explored this issue. According to them: ‘over-representation’ of black children in the child welfare system may well be accounted for by neighbourhood and socio-economic inequalities, although this effect is partially offset by poorer local authorities seeming to operate a higher level of thresholds for intervention”. In other words, it is possible that this high threshold for intervention set by some local authorities reduces the numbers of children who should be referred into the system but are not being referred, meaning it is likely there are vulnerable children being missed by the system.

7. However, our experience at AFRUCA shows that increasing referrals into our service come from a range of local authorities, with 75% of referrals coming under the category of Physical Abuse (AFRUCA Annual Report and Accounts 2018). The driver seems to be demographic changes which is a nationwide phenomenon. Across Greater Manchester, for example, the increase in movement by African families into different boroughs, correlates with increasing referrals into our service. A good example is Trafford Council where we have experienced a 50% increase in referrals in just one year. The highest number of referrals into our service comes from Manchester City Council and this has been the case for the past two years (AFRUCA Annual Report and Accounts 2018). This also mirrors our experience in London where our highest referrals come from Lambeth Council but with increasing referrals from London Borough of Barking and Dagenham which has experienced significant growth in Black and African populations in recent years (<https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/1.2-Growth-and-changes-in-population.pdf>). In other words, the increasing rate of referrals of Black and African children into local child protection systems across the board mirrors the over-representation of this category of children at the national level. Our concern is that this increase is still largely disproportionate in relation to the wider population of Black children in England.

8. The next step then is to examine the reasons for this disproportionality. The remainder of this Chapter will explore these issues.

2.3 UK LAW ON PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT – SECTION 58, CHILDREN ACT 2004

9. Section 58 of the UK Children Act 2004 states that parents or person acting in loco parentis may use “reasonable chastisement” to control their children’s behaviour. However, in doing so they must not use any implement nor leave a mark on the child’s body.

10. This legislation also effectively limited the use of the defence of reasonable chastisement so that it can no longer be employed as a defence when parents or legal guardians are being charged with the offences against child wounding, actual or grievous bodily harm or cruelty. This means that parents and others can no longer use the justification of reasonable chastisement or punishment when a child sustains an injury serious enough to warrant a charge of assault or actual bodily harm (DCSF 2007: page 5).

11. Corporal punishment used to be the norm in England. However it was prohibited in all state schools in 1986 and in full time public schools in 1999. In 2001, the use of corporal punishment was ended in children’s homes, it was prohibited in foster care in 2002 and ended in early year education in 2007 (Singleton 2010 page 3). However, gaps still exist in the system where non formal part time education settings, especially in ethnic minority communities including Sunday schools and Madrassahs have no statutory prohibition on the use of physical punishment. Theoretically, adults in such settings could use the defence of reasonable chastisement if they were charged for beating or spanking a child in their care (Singleton 2010 page 4). This situation can put children at risk of harm, especially where faith leaders have limited knowledge of UK laws around child protection (What is Physical Abuse 2018: page 6).

12. AFRUCA has long advocated for the term “reasonable chastisement” to be reviewed because we believe it is too subjective and ambiguous and excludes some forms of corporal punishments done to children from different ethnicities. “Reasonable chastisement” to us is a subjective concept and many parents’ understanding and interpretation of it can in turn be subjected to many other factors including culture, language, religion as well as their own experiences of “discipline” in childhood (AFRUCA: What is Child Abuse 2018, page 6). Certainly, for a parent or an adult (for example a faith leader) arriving from another country where corporal discipline is a standard occurrence as part of child upbringing, the term “reasonable chastisement” is subjective and can be seen as a licence for child abuse, especially

in situations where there is a very limited knowledge of UK laws on child protection and safeguarding (What is Physical Abuse 2018, page 6). This is why we at AFRUCA strongly believe that all forms of physical chastisement at home and in all English institutions – both formal and informal, should be criminalised since it would send a clear message that this is not an acceptable form of child discipline. This position is not far-fetched. In Scotland, for example, a new bill to ban the smacking of children has been published (The Scotsman 7 September 2018).

13. Another issue is the role of skin pigmentation in child abuse detection. It is clearly more difficult to detect bruising on a child with dark skin tone or pigmentation than a child with lighter skin tone, for example. This means that often times, no marks are detected on the child's body, after the occurrence of abuse, unless these are quite serious. Moreover, carers do not have to use an implement in order to enforce physical chastisement. In many African communities, for example, the use of stressful positions which can cause untold harm and pain to children, is quite common, as stated above (What is Child Abuse, 2018 page 5). These practices do not conform to the principles of "reasonable chastisement", so in theory are not covered by the definition of this legislation. However, in our work, we have seen agencies take legal action against parents for non-contact physical abuse such as subjecting children to long hours of stressful positions, although we do not believe many local authorities have an understanding of this issue. This implies that many cases of physical abuse involving non-contact forms of chastisement could have been missed by agencies because no implement has been utilised and no injury on the child's body is detected.

2.4 CULTURE, RELIGION AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

14. The issue of physical punishment is a common phenomenon in many different African communities – across Greater Manchester, in the UK generally, in the wider African diaspora and in Africa itself (What is Physical Abuse 2018 page 6). The notion of "good home training" to build disciplined, responsible and strong characters requires that children are strictly brought up which in many cases can include practices such as beating, slapping, hitting and other forms of physical violence to correct behaviour seen as inappropriate. Indeed, at AFRUCA, in assessing cases where physical abuse has occurred in African families, many parents allude to employing strict discipline as a consequence of their own upbringing and as a widely accepted and acceptable cultural and

familial norm ("my father beat me and it did me no harm"). This position is also confirmed by the results of this research project (See Chapter Three). In addition, parents tell us they want their children to perform well academically and "become somebody in society". The traditional strong focus on educational attainment by many African families can be another reason that parents employ strict discipline to ensure their children study as hard as possible.

15. Many recently arrived parents struggle to navigate their new lives in the country. Racism and the effects of engaging with the complex immigration system takes its toll on the financial, emotional and psychological well-being of parents (AFRUCA Manual on Child Protection 2018). In addition, many parents are concerned about 'negative Western influences' and the possibility of their children being wrongly influenced outside the home by their peers. With the recent spate in gun and knife crimes and other criminal behaviour among young people across Greater Manchester and in the country, generally, many parents are genuinely fearful for their children and might wish to enforce strict discipline in the home in order to ensure their children do not become victims or perpetrators of such criminal activities (What is Physical Abuse 2018 page 7).

16. The role of religion in fuelling corporal punishment in African families is equally important to note. At AFRUCA, 8 out of 10 parents referred to our social work child protection service have direct and close links with a church or a mosque. This is not surprising because Black and African people are generally seen to have strong religious values (AFRUCA: What is Child Abuse 2018 page 8). This becomes apparent in the way children are brought up with religious dictates determining relationships between parents and their children, especially in enforcing parental authority and in the prohibition of 'sinful' behaviour. Disobedience of parental authority, lack of respect for authority figures even outside the home (for example in schools, Sunday schools, Madrassahs) can be regarded as 'sinful' behaviours. In many instances, parents tend to respond to these behaviours by following the scriptural directive of "spare the rod and spoil the child" (What is Child Abuse 2018 page 8).

17. Therefore, the duality of culture and religion has a strong influence in the upbringing of children in many African families. Both have a strong reliance on the notion of discipline as a core element of parenting and as a preventive or corrective mechanism for deficient behaviour. The disproportionality of African children in the child protection system under the category of Physical Abuse could therefore be due to the influence of the duality of culture and religion in child upbringing. It is critical for local authority practitioners to develop a better understanding of the influences of culture and religion on child upbringing so they are better able to intervene in families.

18. There is however another instance where the presence of a combination of religion and culture can result in a negative impact on the child. This is in relation to the phenomenon of branding children as witches or as possessed by evil spirits. In England, there have been a number of cases where children have been grossly abused, even killed based on the belief that they are possessed by evil spirits. For example, in 2011, Eric Bikubi and Magalie Bamu were both given life sentences for the torture and murder of Magalie's brother Kristy on Christmas Day 2010 because they believed he was possessed by evil spirits. This shocking case demonstrated how Eric's cultural and religious stance led him to believe Kristy must have been possessed by evil spirits to have wet himself. The subsequent torture Kristy was subjected to, was seen as a way of "beating out the evil spirits in him." In assessing some cases of physical abuse referred to AFRUCA social work team, we were able to detect that these have their roots in witchcraft and possession branding which was not apparent to the local authority practitioners working on the case. This therefore calls for better training for local authority staff to develop knowledge and understanding of this new form of child abuse to better safeguard children.

2.5 IMPACT OF PHYSICAL ABUSE ON AFRICAN CHILDREN

19. One of the key issues that often comes up in our community work is the lack of awareness of how physical chastisement can impact on children. Statements like "my parents beat me and it did me no harm" come up often in discussions at community events. A key aspect of AFRUCA's work with parents has therefore been to highlight the many negative consequences of physical abuse on children.

20. The effects of physical abuse on a child can be physical, behavioural, emotional and cognitive but also short and long term (What is Physical Abuse page 17). Physical abuse can lead to cognitive impairment affecting children's educational performance and lead to behavioural problems, including aggression towards other children. Short term, direct impact of physical abuse can be the physical pain experienced, or a bruising or an injury, but long term impact is more severe and can range from brain damage from a head trauma, to chronic pain, disability or even death. Persistent physical abuse can also lead to a child suffering from different long term health problems and also death as is apparent in many Serious Case Reviews, including that of Victoria Climbié in 2000.

21. The long term emotional impact of physical abuse might not be apparent to many parents. These can range from low self-esteem, to depression and anxiety. Children who experience persistent physical abuse can also suffer from attachment difficulties and come to believe physical abuse is the norm where parent and child relationships are concerned. The cycle of abuse in which children who experience abuse also abuse others is a clear consequence of this type of parenting. When parents tell us at AFRUCA: "my parents beat me and it did me no harm", we explain to them the normalisation process which makes it possible for them to re-enact the abuse they experienced on their own children.

2.6 LESSONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Prevention and Early Intervention

22. There is a clear-cut case to be made for strengthening prevention and early intervention approaches by agencies in order to address many of the issues raised in this Chapter. Many parents need to understand the differences in the law in relation to child protection between many African countries and England and the statutory role that exists for local authority intervention in families. Stronger efforts to propagate knowledge on alternative strategies to corporal punishments by such families is equally essential. Early intervention approaches are important so that work is done with vulnerable families before abuse occurs and outside child protection legal systems. In particular, faith groups are an important link in prevention efforts and work with them to strengthen child protection practices needs to be prioritised.

Training in Cultural Intelligence

23. It is critical for practitioners who work with African families (and other new communities) to gain the important knowledge and understanding of cultural practices and how this can impact on parenting and child protection. Cultural intelligence means being able to navigate different cultures and work successfully across cultural boundaries. Training on cultural intelligence should be mandatory for all practitioners working in areas with a high or growing population of people from diverse communities.

Closer Links With Specialist Charities and Community Organisations

24. Lastly, specialist charities working with families from diverse communities are a huge source of knowledge and intelligence for practitioners and policy-makers and can help to inform local decision-making in relation to “what works” for local agencies. It is critical that they are well engaged to help strengthen local intervention in communities for effective changes to occur.

CHAPTER THREE: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES & FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS – KEY FINDINGS

3.1 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- This Chapter focuses on our findings based on focus group sessions held with 10 different community groups and organisations across Greater Manchester between November 2017 and June 2018. The sessions included participants from a range of African communities based in Greater Manchester. Some participants from the focus groups also filled in individual questionnaires to capture individual responses.

- Findings also include interviews with young adults some of whom were partly raised in the UK, capturing their experiences and views on physical chastisement. A list of participating organisations and breakdown of participants is included at Annex Two.

3.1.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

- A total number of 192 participants were involved in the focus groups and 97 of these also filled in individual questionnaire. The total number of female participants were 164 (85%) and 28 were males (15%). The highest number of participants 37% were originally from Nigeria, followed by Congo 11%. 7% either identified themselves as from other countries and not Africa or did not disclose their country of origin. The table below shows the distribution of participants by country of origin.

Table Two: Participants Countries of Origin

Country of Origin	Total Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants %
Nigeria	72	37%
Eritrea	20	10%
Zimbabwe	15	8%
Ghana	3	2%
Malawi/Algeria/Angola/Zambia	4	2%
Cameroon	5	3%
Uganda	17	9%
Congo	22	11%
Rwanda/Burundi	15	8%
Kenya	3	2%
Sudan	2	1%
Others	14	7%
Total	192	100%

3.1.2 PARTICIPANTS PLACES OF RESIDENCE

• Events were held across Greater Manchester with participants resident in different parts of the region attending. The highest number of participants were from Oldham 29%, followed by Manchester 25%, Trafford 9%, Salford & Rochdale 8% each, Tameside 3%, Stockport 2% and others not disclosed 16%.

Table Three: Resident Distribution Across Greater Manchester

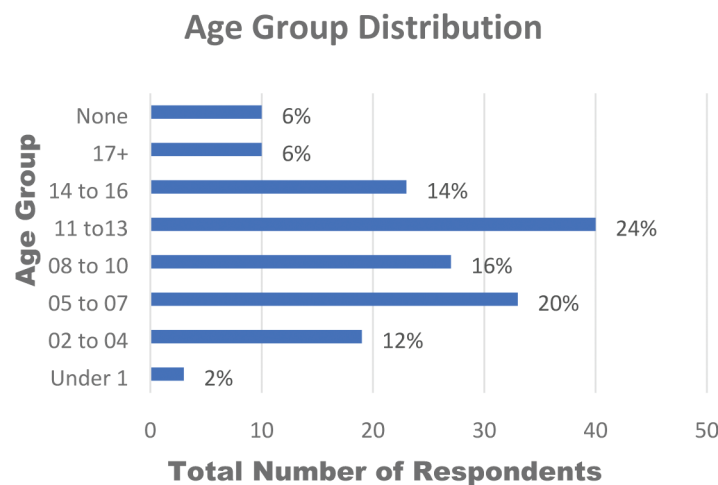
Place of Residence	No. of Participants	Percentage %
Manchester City	48	25%
Trafford	18	9%
Salford	15	8%
Rochdale	16	8%
Oldham	55	29%
Tameside	6	3%
Stockport	4	2%
Others	30	16%
Sub-total	192	100%

3.2 INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

3.2.1 Overview

• Based on the number of participants who filled in the questionnaire, 24% indicated that they have children between ages 11 to 13, 20% have 05 to 07, 16% 08 to 10, 14% 14 to 16, 12% 02 to 04, 6% 17+, another 6% had no children and only 2% had children under 1 year. Majority of participants therefore have children of teen-ages. Responses provided in the questionnaire below can generally be considered with this background in mind.

Figure One: Age Group of Children of Participants

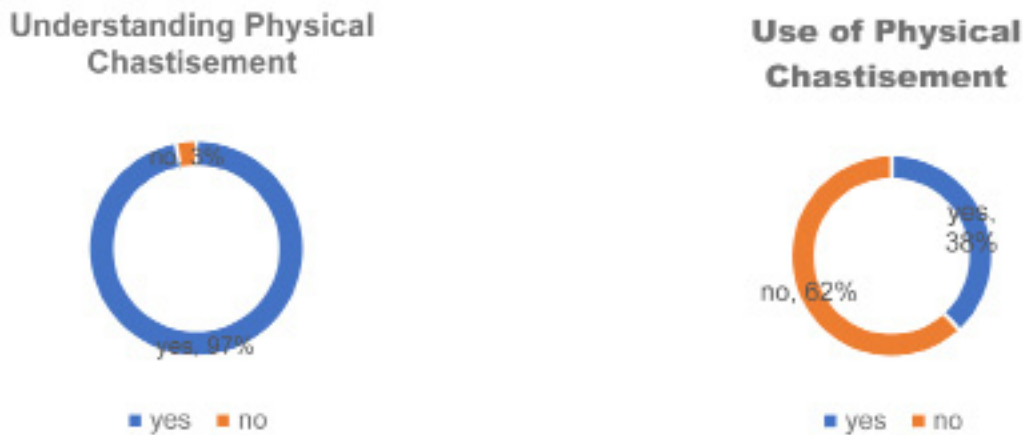


3.2.2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

A. When Asked If They Understood What Physical Chastisement Meant And If They Used It In Managing Children's Behaviour.

- 97% of respondents indicated that they knew what physical chastisement meant while 3% indicated they did not know what it was.

Figures Two and Three: Understanding and Use of Physical Chastisement

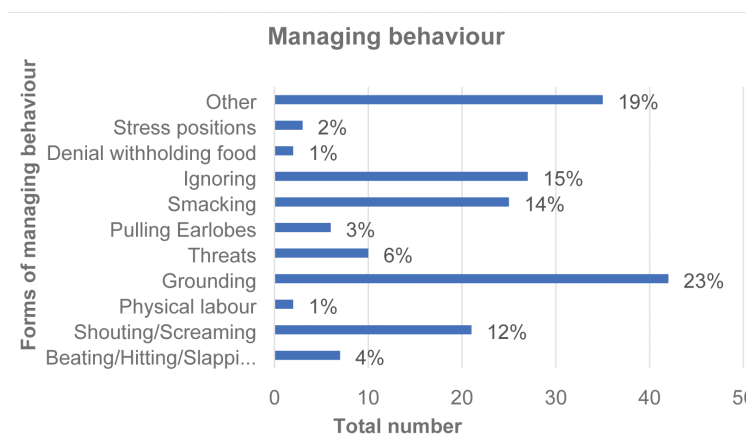


- 38% of respondents indicated that they used physical chastisement (mostly smacking) to discipline their children while 62% indicated that they do not use physical chastisement.

B. When Asked Which of The Listed Forms of Managing Behaviour Used?

- Respondents indicated a combination of different forms used but the most common was Grounding 23%, Others 19%, Ignoring 15%, Smacking 14%, Shouting 12%, Threats 6%, Beating/Slapping 4% and the least common were Pulling earlobes, stress positions 2% and denial of food 1%.

Figure Four: Managing Behaviour



C. When Asked Why They Used Physical Chastisement in Managing Children’s Behaviour, The Following Reasons Were Given:

- “It works sometimes when every other means fails”
- “To instil discipline and avoid misbehaving again.”
- “Only method I know that works”
- “To set boundaries and teach them the right way”
- “Sometimes it’s the only language they understand”
- “Culturally I believe physical chastisement helps to get immediate compliance. I was smacked when I was a kid so it would be difficult to steer away from the cultural belief of spare the rod and spoil the child”.
- “It was used when I was growing up and it always worked”
- “I don’t use physical chastisement only because of the fear to have my children removed and taken into care. I am aware of the consequences. However, I would use it if I had that choice.”
- “Sometimes you get provoked by the children especially those in that age where they storm out/walk out on you even before you finish a sentence.”
- “I used to use physical chastisement as it was what I knew. I naturally followed the footsteps of my mum.”
- “Because of frustration especially as a single mum. There is no one to help out.”
- “It’s a cultural way of disciplining.”
- “I only use it when the issue at hand is extreme and it is necessary to restore them back on track.”
- “I use after several warnings and they are not complying”
- “Used as a last resort when all other means have failed.”
- “It helps them conform because they don’t want to experience the pain from smacking”

D. When Asked Which Other Listed Forms Of Managing Behaviour Are Used?

• Again, a combination of different forms of behaviour management techniques were mentioned. Rewarding good behaviour/giving praises/hugs/kisses and Enjoying/Celebrating/Encouraging children were the most used.

Table Three: Alternative Forms of Managing Behaviour

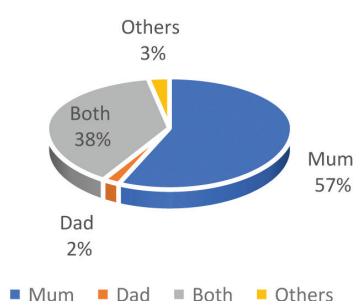
Alternative Forms of Managing behaviour	Total No. of respondents
Rewarding good behaviour/praises/hugs/kisses	67
Ignoring behaviour	28
Allowing Children some control choices	36
Schedule quality time each day with them/one on one	33
Enjoy/Celebrate/ Encourage your children	52
Develop strong bond with your child	46
Never discipline children out of anger/take time to calm down	28
Criticise behaviour not the child	20
Taking away privileges/minor deprivation	48
Set boundaries from a very young age	47
Others	3

E. When Asked Whose Responsibility It Was To Discipline Children In The Home And Whether The Method Of Discipline Changes With Age?

- 57% of respondents to this question indicated that it is the Mum, 38% said it is both Mum and Dad, while 2% indicated that it is the Dad and 3% mentioned others naming older siblings and other relatives. This showed the key role that women had in child upbringing in the community.
- 96% of respondents indicated that their mode of discipline changes with age while the other 4% either indicated No or did not respond to the question.

Figure Five: Responsibility for Disciplining Children in the Home

Responsibility of Disciplining



F. When Asked If They Were Aware Of UK Law On Physical Chastisement And If They Knew That Children Could Be Removed And Placed In Care Because Of Abuse?

- 84% of participants who responded indicated 'Yes' and 14% indicated a lack of awareness. 88% of respondents indicated that they are aware that children can be taken into care because of physical chastisement while 12% indicated they are not aware.

G. When Asked If Their Children Had Ever Been Removed Due To Physical Chastisement?

- Only one respondent indicated that her children had been taken away for a few weeks and said it was a painful experience and she still has the psychological effects of it.

H. When Asked If They Considered Using Other Forms Of Managing Behaviour Other Than Physical Chastisement?

- 98% of respondents indicated they would while 4% indicated 'No' to this question.

I. When Asked If They Would Attend A Training Programme On Child Protection To Learn About Parenting Without Using Physical Chastisement?

- 87% of respondents indicated they would attend training while 13% said they would not.

3.3 OVERALL FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

3.3.1 Overview

- Focus Group Sessions were held between November 2017 and June 2018 with 10 different groups across Greater Manchester. A total number of 192 participants took part including 164 Women (85%) and 28 Males (15%). Majority of participants were women. Participants comprised of both Christian and Muslim faiths. Most of the participants were originally from Nigeria, Congo, Eritrea, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Rwanda/Burundi and a few from Cameroon, Kenya, Sudan, Malawi, Algeria, Angola & Zambia. A list of participating organisations and a breakdown of participants is at Annex Two.

3.3.2 Focus Group Sessions: Responses

A. Respondents' Understanding Of Discipline And Punishment

- Most of the participants said that physical chastisement is a form of discipline which was often used both at home and in school back in Africa. They mentioned that punishment and discipline are inter-related and the process of discipline involves both reward and punishment. On the other hand, they said discipline tends to be more verbal while punishment is more physical.
- Some agreed that discipline starts with patience and when a child is not changing you resort to punishment, though most times this is done in anger.
- Some others said that physical chastisement is a firmer way to discipline a child using measures like smacking, pinching, pushing, using a belt or whip locally called 'Koboko'.
- A number of participants said physical chastisement is not something they use in the UK because of the fear of the law but if they had a way, it would be used in order not to lose sight of where they are coming from.
- Some parents said that they have had to re-learn the process of disciplining children, though the major challenge is the mixed language in terms of discipline between schools in the UK and home practices. They feel support from schools is negligible, so parents have to deal with difficult behaviour by themselves which was never the case when they were growing up.

B. The Role Of The Community In Managing Children's Behaviour

- Respondents said that in the African culture, the community played a supplementary role in raising children. Culturally, community members helped in shaping and disciplining children. For instance, if a child had persistent behavioural issues, then the parent would send them to another close and trusted relative or family friend to help with disciplining, even if it only involved talking to the child.
- Most of the respondents said that things were different in the UK because of the individualistic nature of society. People chose to look the other way when they see children misbehaving; "that's why children are so unruly".
- Participants said life in the UK is quite different and it is a lot tougher to raise children especially teenagers. "Security is a big concern, you can't just confront teenagers in the community when they are behaving badly, some could be armed with knives or even go after your children. 'We just look the other way'", one person said.
- One participant said, "Culturally, if a community member has unruly children, I will not let my children mix with them and I will express it clearly to my children".
- Others said that they do not easily let out children to mix with other children in their neighbourhood unless they are familiar with their behaviours.
- Another mentioned that in the community, mothers have a lot of pressure, because they are held accountable for children's upbringing.
- Another participant said, "sometimes the problem is not the children but the men, most times where there is domestic violence, physical chastisement is not uncommon".
- On the role of the community in raising children, participants mentioned that here in the UK, the church is their main community connection and plays a role in training children good behaviour. Church programmes like Sunday school for the younger children and youth groups help to teach good behaviour in line with the word of God.
- Sometimes close family friends help especially when as parents they share their struggles with children's behaviour, though the level of involvement is not as much as back in Africa.

C. Reasons For Using Physical Chastisement To Manage Children's Behaviour

- Most participants described physical chastisement as a favourite and effective form of discipline because no child wants to be smacked to an extent that a mere threat to smack or beat can yield instant compliance. It tends to act as a deterrent to bad behaviour.
- Majority of participants were of the view that physical chastisement is not abuse, but instead a form of discipline otherwise that would mean they were all abused. They were beaten with canes at home and school when they behaved badly.
- "Physical Chastisement has been used in our cultures for generations and generations as a form of disciplining children"
- Someone said: "Back home it was even used to encourage good grades in schools. A bad school report called for punishment because education was never free".
- Another respondent mentioned that, sometimes parents do not choose physical chastisement intentionally, but it can happen when children push you to the limit.
- Some respondents commented that it is a common practice where there is no communication between parents and children.
- One participant said, in Nigeria it is like a proverb 'The only thing children understand is smacking, it speaks louder to them'.
- Parents can sometimes vent their anxieties on the children depending on what they are going through at the time. One mentioned that it not uncommon to find mothers angry, tired and stressed because some men from African communities do not give as much support around the home or even help with disciplining children. So, the woman finds herself overwhelmed with everything around the household in addition to attending to children.
- Some participants also voiced a lack of support from schools. They feel the responsibility of disciplining a child is left with the parent but when things go wrong, and a parent reacts in what is deemed against the law, they find themselves labelled as abusers. One parent gave an example, that back in Africa, when children went to school late the school took responsibility in correcting such bad practices, but here in the UK if a child is late, the parent is answerable even when they have struggled to ensure the children get to school on time.

- She said, many of our communities don't know English or speak very little of it and this can be a disadvantage because children can take advantage or be taken advantage of. Language is a big barrier when you have an issue with children, and as a parent you are left helpless.

D. The Effects of Physical Chastisement **Positives outcomes**

Participants gave the following responses:

- Participants said it is effective if done with talking or explanation. They said talking to children should be continuous for them to know the realities of life.
- Another participant mentioned that, it can have a positive effect on the children in that it deters children from taking the wrong path in life. "From personal experience, I always had to think twice before making wrong choices because I knew what would follow" said this respondent.

Negative outcomes

Participants gave the following responses:

- Extreme physical chastisement can cause a lot of long term damage to the psychological wellbeing of children.
- It leads to confusion especially when used without explanation on why it is being used
- It instils fear in the children and this can have a detrimental effect on the emotional well-being of a child.
- It may cause alienation because children may come to dislike their parents or carers.
- Children who are habitually beaten become used to it which leads to more indiscipline
- Children become numb and defenceless
- Some children become habitual liars for fear of getting into trouble
- Children feeling humiliated
- Children running away from home
- Creates resentment in children and in most cases lead to low self-esteem.
- Other participants said it can have a negative impact on the emotional well-being especially if there are no other forms of discipline being used. Children can become aggressive, bullies and abusers themselves.

F. Religious Views On Physical Chastisement

- Generally, those practising Christianity, said that their faith plays a big role in how they raise their children, but this has no direct link to the use of physical chastisement.
- One participant mentioned that the Bible says: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' but this can be taken out of contexts.

- Another mentioned that even the Quran uses symbolic language which has to be rightfully interpreted. Participants generally agreed that the practice of physical chastisement is more cultural than religious.

- Some participants mentioned they believe scripture should be balanced and Christians should not take things out of context. They said that the bible also instructs us not to provoke our children to anger.

G. The Law And Physical Chastisement

- Most participants indicated that they are not very sure what is expected of them regarding physical chastisement and most said they are not aware of the details of the law.

- One mentioned that the law is not really very clear, it is very confusing and she knows people who have been in trouble for smacking their children even when there were no visible marks on their children.

- Some respondents said physical chastisement is abuse, only if it is extreme and negatively impacts on the wellbeing of children. Others indicated that physical chastisement is not abuse, because the intention is not to hurt children but correct them. It is another form of discipline.

- Asked whether there are laws on physical chastisement in their countries of origin, participants said that the laws are there, but people are either not aware of them or they are not enforced.

- On whether there should be a complete ban on smacking, most participants said the law needs to be clear, clause of reasonable cannot be easily defined, and yet it is important as parents to abide by the law. Society does not help sometimes.

- Another mentioned that smacking should not be a reason for taking children from their parents. Many parents love their children, they should always investigate the underlying causes and find solutions instead of taking them through the agony of taking away their children.

- One parent was in support of a complete ban on smacking.

H. Further Support

- On the question of extra support needed by parents, participants mentioned:
 - The need for awareness about the law on child protection through workshops and trainings.
 - The need for more work with churches, mosques, community groups and schools that have high numbers of ethnic minorities.
 - One participant added that parents need to befriend teachers so that there is communication. Children can have different characters at school and home, so it is always important for both parties to work together.
 - One said parents also need a voice especially when they are struggling with children with bad behaviour. Parents need to be listened to instead of rushing to involve social services.
 - Parents need to teach children about their culture but at the same time deal with the reality that they have not been born or are growing up in Africa.
 - They also said there should be no labelling of parents because sometimes African parents are labelled as abusers for being too strict with their children.
 - Need for information on where to get help especially when struggling with children that have behavioural problems

I. Additional Comments

- One participant mentioned that parents have a duty of care to protect their children. In most cases even when punishing children, they feel it is in their best interest to shape the children and not let them become a nuisance to society. She questioned that, 'who protects the parent when the children become abusive because they know the system protects them'. It is good that children should have a voice, but where do parents run to? They went further to say that the challenges of raising children nowadays is bigger than in their own times.
 - Another added that when children are taken into care the scars associated with that are carried forever by the children and parents. She went on to say that children are in most cases asked leading questions and never have a clue where the whole situation ends until they realise they are being taken from their parents.

- Another mentioned that parents need to have a self-analysis in the way they discipline their children to make sure they are not physically abusing children or breaking the law.
 - Another said that more work needs to be done with social services because some professionals have no clue at all where people are coming from and this results in communities being labelled. Most people from Africa have never experienced or seen children being taken into foster care until they came to the UK. So, it becomes such a traumatic experience even just knowing that someone in the community has had their children taken away.
 - They concluded by commending organisations like AFRUCA for the work being done to help bridge that gap in cultural understanding.

3.4 SHORT INTERVIEW WITH YOUNG ADULTS

Respondent 1: Mixed heritage Nigerian & English

- Physical chastisement was a way of life as they grew up and this had an impact on the way she is raising her own children. She mentioned that she decided from onset that she will always speak/talk to her children and not hit them.

Respondent 2: Parents originally from Zimbabwe

- From personal experience, physical chastisement was a way of discipline. "We were never allowed to answer back or given a chance to explain ourselves. It's like your parents are always in control and you have to keep quiet".
 - They said parents need to be cautious about how they deal with the children. If physical chastisement affects their self-esteem and confidence, then more patience should be exercised even if smacking seems to be the easiest option.

3.5 FOCUS GROUP FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Overview

A short focus group session was held with young adults on 10 May 2018. There were a total of six female participants. All were either born in the UK to first generation African parents or raised in the UK from a very young age so presented different views from those of their parents who were either born or grew up in Africa. Participants were from Sudan (2), Ghana (2), Kenya (1) and Zambia (1).

Responses

A. Cultural And Community Attitudes On Physical Chastisement

- Participants said that punishment is an act or reaction to an action. Another said that discipline is correction, giving reasons, capturing boundaries.
- One participant said that physical chastisement was not often used, but when her mother did use it, she always learned her lesson and did not repeat the same mistake.
- Another said that the intention for physical chastisement was to discipline, however parents who use it all the time are wrong and cause a lot of damage to the children. For instance, one child, a participant knew was beaten with no clothes on.
- Another participant felt it was treated as discipline most of the time but that it was not because some parents were angry, but due to personal frustrations. She added that parents can have issues not dealt with and pass on the anger to children.
- One participant didn't see it as abuse but something normal. Children from African parents never talked about it at school. As young children they used to talk about it amongst fellow black/African children but never as a way of reporting because it was normal.

B. The Role Of The Community In Managing Children's Behaviour

- One participant said the community played no role in relation to physical chastisement, in other words no community member or relative touched or smacked her. But her mother would involve a priest or close family members like aunties or uncles to 'have a word' about bad behaviour or naughtiness.

- One participant said naughty cousins would be sent back to Africa to relatives who could support them without physical chastisement involved and turned their lives around. Some were sent back to Africa in boarding schools where there is physical chastisement and came back better. So sometimes it changes lives.

- One participant mentioned that her brother was beaten everyday by her mother for being left handed and doing everything like eating with the left hand, he never turned out better instead it resulted in low self-esteem and expecting the same reaction from their mother every time.

C. Reasons For Physical Chastisement

- Participants said most times no reasons were given or if given it was some time after the punishment.
- For some parents it was also for religious reasons i.e. spare the rod and spoil the child.

D. The Effects Of Physical Chastisement

- Participants said some find it effective and others don't. They said talking is more effective
- Another said it seemed normal so she wouldn't call the police, after thinking of the consequences
- One said it caused her to be fearful then, that was in the 1990's and early 2000. Her relationship with her mother broke up due to constant beatings and because she couldn't report, as a child she was scared, hurting and afraid of other siblings' opinions of her.
- Because parents used it often, one participant thought that she was extremely naughty and kept getting herself in trouble, thinking she was a terrible child with no redemption.
- Physical chastisement leads to children having mental health problems, low self-esteem and stressed by the parents' reactions in case they get things wrong.

- Sometimes physical chastisement reduces affection especially in older children and children who can't talk, however one participant said that she had affection and didn't fear her mother, so it had no negative impact on her. Another one said that her mother would have mood swings and became very sensitive as she learnt to avoid confrontation and try to find ways of avoiding being smacked. She gave some examples that when she forged homework signatures her mother still found out and beat her up, sometimes she burnt food and hid the pots but her mother would smell it and beat her up, so she became evasive and a good liar.

- One participant said that her mother would give her a disgusted look, insults, and belittled her along with the physical chastisement. What made it worse was that her mother was a teacher in some schools before relocating to the UK, so when she misbehaved that would mean a double beating when they got home.

- Parents come down hard on their children and chastise them because they use their own insecurities to try and pave what they think is a successful way for children. For example, choosing careers for their children and if children deviate, then they are deemed as wasting their lives if they do not follow the desired standard careers like doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. This suppresses creativity and children sometimes live their lives to try and please parents.

E. Religious Views On Physical Chastisement

- Participants said that parents are advised to beat their children as a form of discipline by their church elders. Pastors' teachings on discipline is that children should listen to and obey their parents.

F. The Law And Physical Chastisement

- One respondent said that it never occurred to her to report and she didn't know it was a crime. The father was a social worker, so she only got smacked when in Africa.

- On whether there should be a complete ban on smacking, one participant said children sometimes can be upsetting when they don't listen and therefore said there shouldn't be a complete ban. However, there should be clear guidelines on the law as it is grey at the moment.

- Another participant said that there should be no smacking because of the psychological impact it causes on the children.

G. Further Support

On other forms of discipline that are used instead of physical chastisement, participants mentioned the following:

- Talking to children, anything done and said with love and affection works better than smacking.

- Privileges removed in various ways hurts more than physical chastisement.

- One participant said that her parents not talking to her when she did something was very effective because it hurt and she felt left out.

- Giving children a voice, to express themselves without saying no or interfering as very often adults and parents speak and make decisions for children without consulting. So, including children in decisions to avoid rebellion

- Boarding schools were used as a solution to children's uncontrollable behaviour and so naughty children were sent to Africa.

- Supporting parents to understand that physical chastisement causes resentment.

- Raising awareness of better parenting practices.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

1. The following is an analysis of the key findings from the focus group sessions and the individual interviews:

Is Physical Chastisement, Child Abuse?

2. All across the different community groups, participants who grew up in Africa all agreed that physical chastisement was a major form of punishment and discipline while growing up. Almost all agreed that it was used both at home and in school and still continues even today. Overall, while some of the participants admitted to using physical chastisement as a form of punishment on their own children as a way of correcting behaviour, many others did not admit to doing so. Majority of participants did not accept that beating children was a form of child abuse, but a form of discipline to correct behaviour, as this was the way in which they themselves were brought up. This is more so in situations where parents said they are fearful for their children being susceptible to peer pressure and negative external influences or not performing well academically. This contrasted with the views of young adults who grew up in the UK. The general, concerted view among this cohort was that physical chastisement was child abuse which caused them various degrees of harm and pain when inflicted by their parents.

3. Allied to this was the general confusion among participants in relation to the law on “reasonable chastisement”. Many parents expressed a lack of understanding of what constituted an offence under this law. Some parents seem to think an offence only occurs if parents use “extreme” chastisement on their children. It seems that some participants have seen evidence of mixed messages or inconsistencies by local authorities in which children who were neither hit with an implement and who had no injury were still removed from families. Furthermore, it is interesting to see some parents advocate for the right to physically chastise “as an option, when all else fails”. There needs to be concrete efforts made to clarify the law to parents, as part of a general training programme for parents on child protection in order to prevent unwitting offending. Having said this, it would be much better, in our view to remove all doubt while at the same time increase protection for children by making it illegal to hit children.

Women As Main Care-Givers

4. Adult participants generally agreed that in African culture, women especially mothers tend to take on additional pressure because they are held accountable for the children’s upbringing. It is instructive that many participants recognised that this extra pressure placed on women could lead to them taking out their stress and anger on children in the form of excessive physical chastisement. While men played a much low keyed role in child upbringing, the impact of reduced positive male influence on children, especially boys, should be considered, especially in relation to negative behaviours outside the home environment. Aligned with this is the recognised impact of domestic violence on children as participants were able to draw a link from their own experiences. It may be that women who experience domestic violence pass on their emotions to their children, leading to children being put at risk.

5. Furthermore, participants highlighted the difficulties involved in asserting themselves over their children where language is a barrier. This means that some parents are not able to verbally communicate effectively, leaving physical chastisement as the only means of communication. Aside the impact of language barriers in parent-child relationships, some participants also felt disempowered in not being able to speak up for their children when issues arise outside the home, thereby increasing vulnerability.

Role of Communities and Faith Organisations

6. It is instructive to see most participants underlined the gaps in community support in raising children in the UK, in comparison to lives in their countries of origin. This is because of the lack of extended family networks here, compared to back home. Participants highlighted that friends and faith leaders have to an extent, been able to fill this gap, especially in situations where religion has a strong role to play in shaping children’s moral character. Adult participants did not agree that religion teaches them to use physical chastisement, although this view was countered by the youth participants who talked about faith leaders encouraging parents to beat their children in order to instil discipline. Nevertheless, it seems that if faith groups are involved in child upbringing, then stronger efforts are required to ensure they can be effective channels of support for parents especially in child abuse prevention.

Role of Schools

7. The disconnection between parents and schools in the provision of “joined-up” support for children, especially those experiencing difficulties was noted by most participants. The feeling was that schools are not supportive of parents experiencing difficulties but are quick to react when things go wrong. Parents felt that schools should work more closely with them so that when issues arise, this can be dealt with jointly, with one voice. This point is crucial to help prevent escalation of problems which might result in parents using physical chastisement as a result of frustration or because they feel this is the best way to solve the problem. In this way, schools can become facilitators, supporting parents to access services which otherwise might not be easily available to them.

Involvement in Child Protection Systems

8. Participants decried the disempowering nature of involvement in child protection systems and the feeling of helplessness experienced when children are aware that they have “rights” or that their parents can be sanctioned for physically chastising their children. This feeling of disempowerment stems from the fear of losing their children, and also the fear of being at the mercy of the system, or having to deal with practitioners with limited knowledge and understanding of African cultural norms and practices. Some participants talked about their anger at being labelled as “child-abusers” for wanting to discipline their children, while society decries the rise in crime and criminality among young people. Most of the participants felt that without the use of physical chastisement, they would have no way of correcting their children and helping them on the right path. It is instructive to note that some families have tried to deal with this situation by sending their children away to boarding schools in their home countries, where physical chastisement is widely used. This essentially means that parents should be provided with alternative tools to ensure discipline can occur in the home but without the use of extreme measures which can lead to children being abused and consequently being removed from their families.

Impact of Physical Chastisement on Children

9. Despite the divergent viewpoints on physical chastisement among adult participants, it is interesting to note that almost all of them were able to pin-point the negative long and short term effects of this practice on children. This goes to show that most participants recognised that physical chastisement as a form of child discipline can be harmful to children. This matches the views presented by the young participants in describing the negative, even long term impact of physical chastisement on themselves by their parents. Whereas parents might have different views about the purpose and benefits of physical chastisement (to correct behaviour, to instil discipline), they were able to demonstrate that this causes harm to children, effectively negating whatever reasons they might have for using it.

Alternatives to Physical Chastisement

10. It is clear from the responses provided by participants at the focus groups and the individual interviews that parents are very much aware of various alternative forms of discipline which they claim to employ as part of their repertoire of parenting tools. These were well listed by parents at the various sessions. At this same time, most respondents, when asked if the law on physical chastisement should be banned, said “no”. This shows that certain learned behaviours can be difficult to shift. Therefore, the key challenge for agencies like AFRUCA as a prevention strategy is not just to train parents about alternatives to using physical chastisement, but how to strengthen parents’ ability to use these alternative tools without reverting to physical chastisement. We believe this is an ongoing challenge which requires joint working by various agencies, but with stronger efforts and willingness by parents themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- There is a growing number of children from African communities being referred into child protection systems under the category of physical abuse. From our experience, this is not just across Greater Manchester but seems to be a national trend in areas with a growing numbers of African families.
- Most African parents love their children and want the best outcomes for them. The use of physical chastisement to instil discipline in children is regarded as both a cultural and religious child-rearing practice to build moral values, strong character and respect for others. For most parents, this is how they were raised as children back home in Africa. However, within the context of UK laws, this practice can unwittingly lead to children being abused and harmed.
- Parents recognise the long and short term harm to children posed by physical chastisement, which overrides any usefulness or benefits of this form of parenting. This requires that parents are supported to gain and employ new tools to enable them achieve the above outcomes without breaking the law or putting children at risk of harm.
- The principles of “reasonable chastisement” as enshrined in Section 58 of the Children Act of 2004 is ambiguous and subjective. Many parents report being confused in relation to what they can or cannot do under this legislation. Non-contact physical chastisement like stress positions harm children but theoretically do not fit the definition of reasonable chastisement. There are a number of grey areas which can lead to lack of effective protection for children, especially in ethnic communities, including African communities.
- There is a lot of pressure on African women on whom the bulk of child upbringing depends, with little or no support from partners and agencies. Women caught up in domestic violence situations are especially vulnerable, and can unwittingly put their children at risk of harm as a result of their own emotions and experiences.
- Some parents feel alienated by schools, especially when there is limited language capacity to communicate effectively. This prevents an effective joint-working by both schools and parents to intervene as early as possible when issues occur, which can lead to parents taking extreme measures in the home to address the situation.
- Some parents feel that their language difficulties prevent them from effective communication with their children, leading to physical chastisement as a key mode of communicating with them.
- Some cases of physical chastisement might have other underlying causes including domestic violence and the branding of children as witches. It is possible that a lack of cultural understanding by practitioners means such cases are misdiagnosed or are totally missed.
- There is a strong role for faith organisations to become strong channels of support for parents to better understand religious concepts about child discipline and provide opportunities for training on child protection for faith workers and members of the congregation
- The impact of physical chastisement on children is well recognised by most participants. Many participants also have strong ideas of alternative tools to use in place of beating or smacking. The challenge for agencies is how to work closely with parents to help change behaviour in the best interests of children.
- Local authority child protection workers in areas with a high proportion or a growing number of ethnic communities need to improve their capacities to intervene successfully in families by gaining new skills in cultural intelligence

Recommendations

Strengthening Prevention and Early Intervention Approaches

- There is a clear-cut case to be made for strengthening prevention and early intervention approaches by agencies in order to address many of the issues raised in this report. Many parents need to understand the differences in the law in relation to child protection between many African countries and England and the statutory role that exists for local authority intervention in families. Stronger efforts to propagate knowledge on and use of alternative strategies to corporal punishments by such families is equally essential. Early intervention approaches are important so that work is done with vulnerable families before abuse occurs and outside child protection legal systems.

- In particular, faith groups are an important link in prevention efforts and work with them to strengthen child protection practices needs to be prioritised.

- We therefore recommend that local authorities place more emphasis on prevention and early intervention approaches to help reduce the incidences of abuse towards children; in this case physical abuse towards African children.

Training in Cultural Intelligence

- It is critical for practitioners who work with African families (and other new communities) to gain the important knowledge and understanding of cultural practices and how this can impact on parenting and child protection. Cultural intelligence means being able to navigate different cultures and work successfully across cultural boundaries. Training on cultural intelligence should be mandatory for all practitioners working in areas with a high or growing population of people from diverse communities.

- More specifically, practitioners need to better understand how safeguarding issues like domestic violence and the branding of children as witches or as possessed by evil spirits can lead to children being physically abused. Without a deep knowledge of the cultural factors involved, a wrong assessment can be made to the detriment of the child. We therefore recommend that agencies prioritise knowledge and understanding of these key subjects for their staff, via accredited training programmes by specialist organisations.

Schools and Parents: A Partnership Approach

- Schools are usually the first point of contact with parents and children. It is important that schools can act as channels of support for struggling families, helping to navigate the systems and facilitating access to support on parenting issues. This will help to ensure stressors at home do not escalate to the detriment of the child.

Closer Links With Specialist Charities and Community Organisations

- Specialist charities working with families from diverse communities like AFRUCA are a huge source of knowledge and intelligence for practitioners and policy-makers and can help to inform local decision-making in relation to “what works” for local agencies. It is critical that they are well engaged to help strengthen local intervention in communities for effective changes to occur.

It Should Be Illegal To Smack or Beat Children

- There is some confusion amongst parents about the notion of reasonable chastisement and what this means for child discipline. Many parents have fallen foul of the law because of their strong belief that smacking or beating children is a cultural or religious undertaking which must be adhered to in the best interests of children. However, evidence shows there are many alternatives to beating children that work equally well. This negates the need to beat children in the name of discipline. We therefore ask that this practice is made illegal in England.

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ANNEX ONE

AFRUCA RESEARCH EXPLORING THE ISSUE OF PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT/PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN AMONG AFRICAN COMMUNITIES ACROSS GREATER MANCHESTER & THE ROLE CULTURE PLAYS IN MANAGING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

The main purpose of this research is to explore the practice of physical chastisement/punishment among African communities across Greater Manchester and what role culture plays in managing children's behaviour.

Advice for Interviewees: For the purposes of this research AFRUCA needs to advise you that should any disclosures be made which would place the safety of any individual at risk, this information will be shared with the relevant authorities. Please answer the questions below as best as you can.

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your country of Origin?
2. What is your Gender?
Male Female
3. How many children under 18 live with you?
4. What is their age group?
Under 1yr 02- 04 yrs 05-07yrs 08-10 yrs 11-13 yrs 14-16 yrs 17+
5. Which borough do you reside in?
Manchester City Bury Trafford Rochdale Salford Oldham
Wigan Tameside Bolton Stockport

MANAGING BEHAVIOUR

- 6a. Do you understand what physical chastisement means? Yes No
- 6b. Do you use physical chastisement to manage your child's behaviour? Yes No
- 6c. Which of the following forms of managing behaviour do you use?
Beating/hitting/slapping Smacking Shouting/screaming Pulling earlobes Ignoring
Physical labour Denial/withholding food Grounding Stress positions
Threats Pulling earlobes Other

7a. Why do you use physical chastisement to manage your child's behaviour?

.....

.....

.....

7b. Which of these other alternative forms of managing your child's/children's behaviour have you used?

- Rewarding good behaviour/praises/hugs/kisses Develop strong bond with your child
Ignoring behaviour Never discipline children out of anger/take time to calm down
Allow children some control choices Criticise behaviour not the child
Schedule quality time each day with them/one on one Taking away privileges/minor deprivation
Enjoy/celebrate/encourage your children Set boundaries from a very young age Others

8. Who does the disciplining of children in your home and why?

.....

9. Does your mode of discipline change with age and how? Yes No

THE UK LAW AND PHYSICAL CHASTISEMENT

10. Are you aware of the UK law on physical chastisement/punishment? Yes No

11. Are you aware that Children can be removed and placed in care because of physical chastisement/punishment? Yes No

12. Have your children ever been removed from you due to physical chastisement? Yes No

13. How long were your children in care?.....

14. What was the impact of your children being removed?

i) Yourself

ii) Your Children

15. Would you consider using other alternative forms of discipline that are not against UK Law?
Yes No

16. Would you attend a training programme on child protection to learn about different ways of parenting children without using physical chastisement? Yes No

Thank you for your time in taking part in this research, all contributions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please see attached slip for support and advice.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Cultural and Community attitudes on Physical Chastisement

1. Do you think Physical chastisement is a form of punishment or discipline?
2. What is the communal role towards managing children's behaviour?
3. What are the reasons for the using physical chastisement/punishment as a form of discipline?
4. What are the effects of physical chastisement/punishment on children?
5. Does physical chastisement/punishment affect the overall wellbeing of children? If so how?

Religious views on Physical Chastisement

6. What are your religious views on managing children's behaviour?

The Law and Physical Chastisement

7. Do you think there is a difference between physical chastisement/punishment and physical abuse?
8. Is there any law on physical chastisement/punishment from your country of origin?
9. Do you think there should be a complete ban on physical chastisement/smacking children?

Further Support

10. Please list other alternative forms of discipline/managing behaviour that can be used instead of physical chastisement.
11. What support do you need as parents to explore other alternative forms of discipline instead of physical chastisement?

ANNEX TWO

LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS AND BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS

Focus Group Session with Zimbabwe Women's Organisation (ZIWO)

Date: 4th/11/2017

Total number of participants: 12

Total number of Women: 12

Countries of origin: Zimbabwe: 10, Nigeria:

Focus Group Session with the Eritrean Women's Forum

Date: 18/11/2017

Total number of participants: 20

Total number of Women: 13

Total number of Men: 07

Countries of origin: Eritrea: 20

Focus Group Session with Wonderfully Made Women's Group

Date: 22/11/2017

Total number of participants: 18

Total number of Women: 18

Countries of origin: Nigeria: 15, Ghana: 01, Malawi: 01, Cameroon: 01

Focus Group Session with Caring and Sharing Community Group

Date: 08/02/2018

Total number of participants: 15

Total number of Women: 13

Total number of Men: 02

Countries of origin: Nigeria: 11, Algeria: 01, Uganda: 01, Angola 01, Palestine: 01

Focus Group Session hosted by Family and Youth Alliance Network

Date: 24/02/2018

Total number of participants: 17

Total number of Women: 17

Countries of origin: Nigeria: 13, Uganda: 2, Cameroon: 2

Focus Group Session with the Dorcas Women's Project

Date: 31/03/2018

Total number of participants: 11

Total number of Women: 11

Countries of origin: Burundi/Rwanda/Congo: 11

Focus Group Session hosted by REFLECTEEN

Date: 26/05/2018

Total number of participants: 22

Total number of Women: 14

Total number of Men: 08

Countries of origin: Nigeria: 12 Cameroon: 02, Zimbabwe: 03, Caribbean: 02, UK: 03

Focus Group Session hosted by Support & Action Women's Network

Date: 12/06/2018

Total number of participants: 13

Total number of Women: 06

Total number of Men: 07

Countries of origin: Uganda: 13

Focus Group Session hosted by Amazing Women's Group

Date: 29/05/2018

Total number of participants: 34

Total number of Women: 34

Countries of origin: Nigeria: 16, Uganda: 1, India: 1, Congo: 12 Zimbabwe: 01, Others: 04

Focus Group Session hosted by Unity School Partnership

Date: 23/06/2018

Total number of participants: 22

Total number of Women: 18

Total number of Men: 04

Countries of origin: Congo: 10, Kenya: 02, Burundi: 04 Nigeria: 02, Others: 04

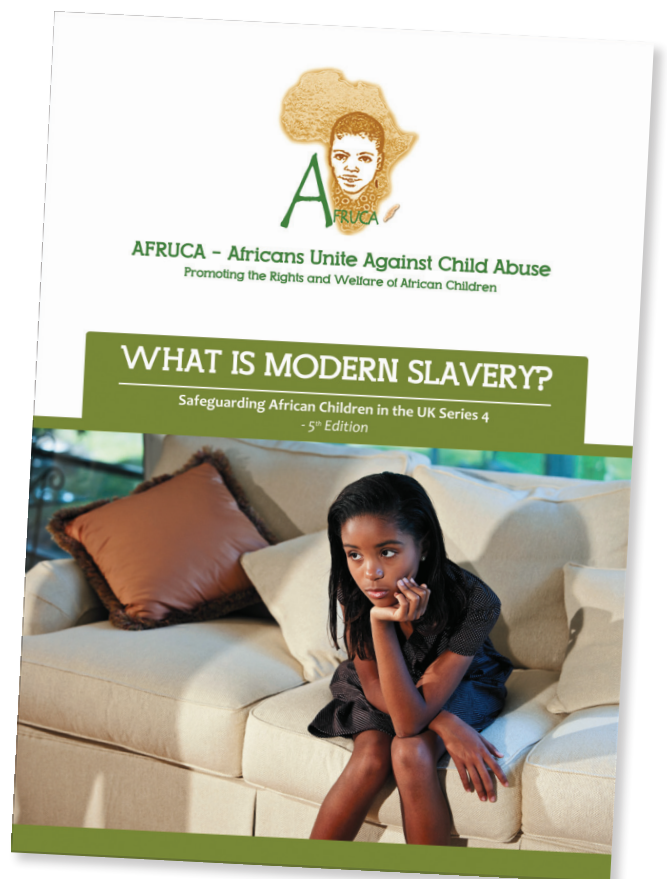
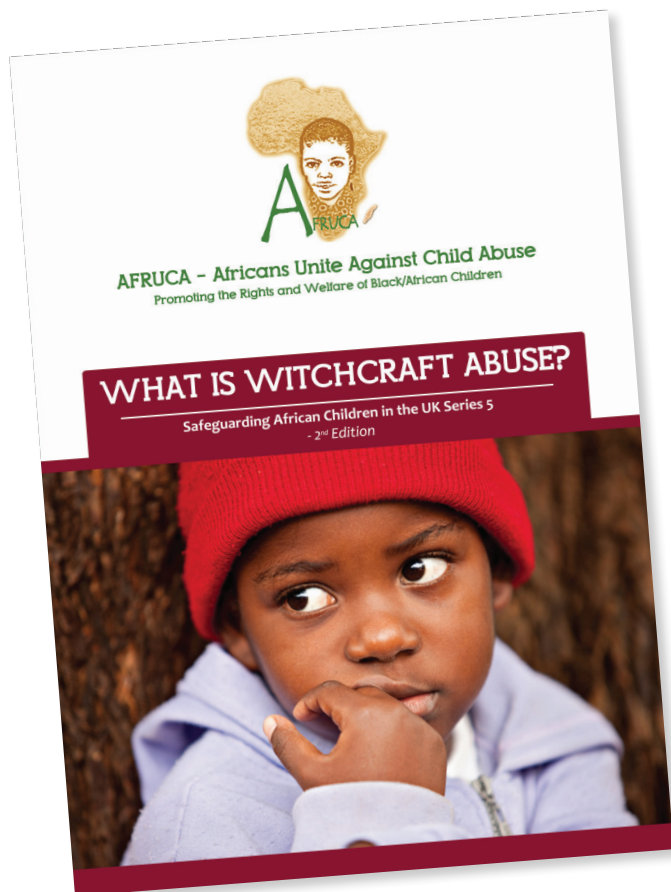
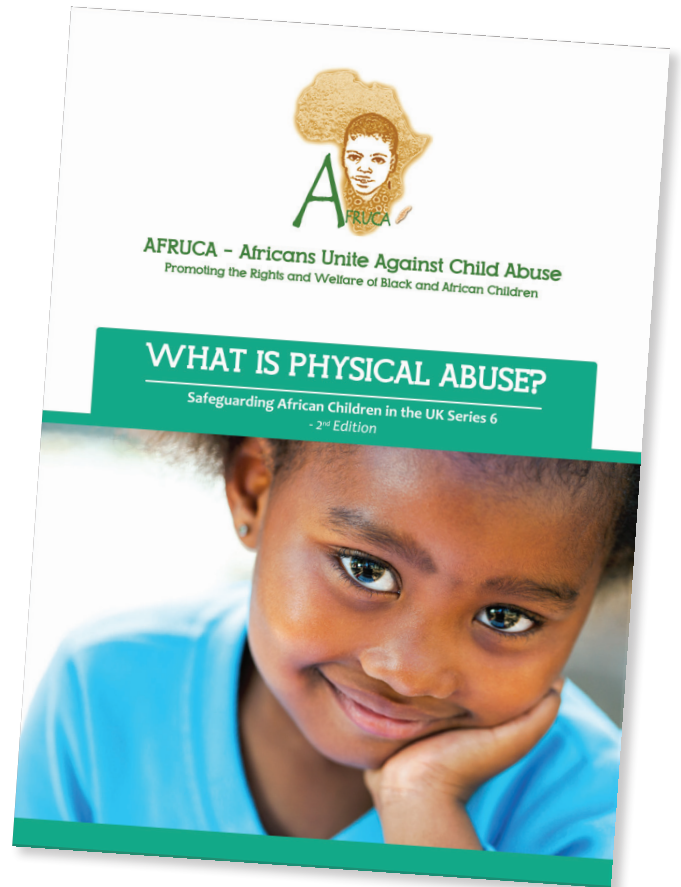
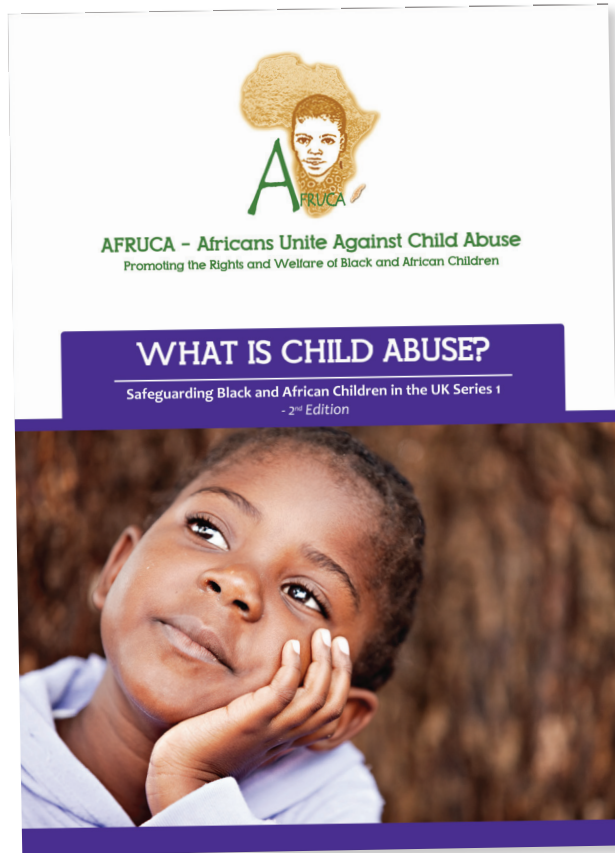
Focus Group for Young Adults

Date: 10/05/2018

Total number of participants: 6 Females

Countries of Origin: Sudan: 02, Ghana: 02, Kenya: 01, Zambia: 01

SAFEGUARDING AFRICAN CHILDREN SERIES





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