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The Effects of a Parenting Program on Parental Disciplinary Beliefs and Practices in

Uganda: Self-reported Influence of Help a Child's Parenting Challenge

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Abstract English

This study examines the self-reported influence of The Basic module of Help a Child's parenting program, the Parenting Challenge, on parental disciplinary beliefs and practices in Uganda. Through qualitative research encompassing 80 interviews with 40 (grand) parents across two villages, results show a self-reported transition from physical disciplinary methods to advisory approaches post-training. Additionally, parents note improvements in communication strategies on household level when employing advisory approaches. Furthermore, unexpected shifts in community dynamics underscore the interconnectedness between parental disciplinary behavior and communal factors. The change in communal ambiance is linked to heightened social interactions, stricter social control and decreased alcohol consumption. This, according to parents, diminishes conflicts on community-level, resulting in less parental anger which impacts their disciplinary methods. These findings emphasize the multifaceted influence of the program on individual and communal dynamics, highlighting its potential for fostering positive parental disciplinary practices within Ugandan communities. While promising, I suggest the need for long-term program evaluation and further exploration of communal influences on disciplinary practices in multiple contexts. I recommend refining research instruments to capture nuances in disciplinary beliefs and practices and assessing advisory approach contents.

Keywords: disciplining, violence against children, parenting practices, parenting program, physical punishment

Abstract Nederlands

Deze studie onderzoekt de zelf gerapporteerde invloed van de basismodule van Help a Child's the Parenting Challenge-programma, op de disciplinaire overtuigingen en praktijken van ouders in Oeganda. Kwalitatief onderzoek met 80 interviews onder 40 (groot)ouders uit twee dorpen toont een zelf gerapporteerde verschuiving van fysieke disciplinaire methoden naar

adviserende benaderingen aan. Bovendien merken ouders verbeteringen op in communicatiestrategieën op familieniveau bij het gebruik van adviserende benaderingen. Daarnaast benadrukken veranderingen in gemeenschapsambiance de relatie tussen ouderlijk disciplineren en gemeenschapsdynamiek. Ouders geven aan dat verhoogde sociale interacties, strengere sociale controle en verminderd alcoholgebruik leidt tot minder conflicten op gemeenschapsniveau, wat hun disciplinaire methoden beïnvloedt. Deze resultaten tonen aan dat het programma bijdraagt aan het verminderen van conflicten binnen families en gemeenschappen, met de potentie om positieve ouderlijke disciplinaire praktijken te bevorderen binnen Oegandese gemeenschappen. Ik benadruk echter ook de noodzaak van langdurige evaluatie en verdere onderzoek naar gemeenschapsinvloeden op disciplinaire praktijken. Aanbevelingen zijn het verfijnen van onderzoeksinstrumenten voor het vastleggen van nuances in disciplinaire overtuigingen en praktijken, en het evalueren van adviserende benaderingen.

Sleutelwoorden: disciplineren, kindermishandeling, ouderlijke praktijken, ouderschapsprogramma, fysiek straffen

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Violence against children (VAC) is a pervasive issue worldwide, affecting over half of all children aged 2 to 17 (Hillis et al., 2016; United Nations Children's Fund, 2014). This form of violence is associated with severe physical, psychological, and developmental consequences, which can have enduring effects on children's lives (Hoeffler et al., 2017; Satinsky et al., 2023). Moreover, VAC significantly challenges societal development by increasing violent behavior among children due to its negative mental, physical, educational, and financial consequences. (Hoeffler et al., 2017; Lansford & Dodge, 2008; World Health Organization, 2020).

Despite its widespread occurrence, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of VAC, with variations existing across different societies (Hoeffler et al., 2017). However, the World Health Organization (WHO) distinguishes several types of VAC, including physical, sexual and emotional violence as well as witnessing violence, followed by three main types of interpersonal violence: youth violence, intimate partner violence and child maltreatment. Child maltreatment includes violent punishment, comprising parental physical disciplinary practices.

Notably, physical disciplinary practices are more common in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where poverty is associated with the adoption of harsh disciplinary measures, influenced by household insecurities such as access to basic necessities like food, water, and material resources (Hillis et al., 2016; Park & Lau, 2015; Satinsky et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2014). Additionally, adults with limited education are more likely to view physical disciplining as necessary (UNICEF, 2014). Yet, the connection between VAC and economic development is complex, as poverty can both stem from and fuel instances of violence (Hoeffler et al., 2017; Lansford & Dodge, 2008).

Given that most instances of violence occur at home, with parents often being the perpetrators, the need to focus on parental VAC is emphasized in research (e.g. Pinheiro, 2006). Despite the lack of reliable global data, country-specific statistics show that 92% of non-fatal abuse cases involve at least one parent (Children's Bureau, 2017), with a 60% prevalence in Africa (WHO, 2020). Although there are variations across societies regarding the normative perceptions of harsh discipline, even the use of culturally accepted strategies of parental VAC impact children's developmental outcomes (Hoeffler et al., 2017; Satinsky et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to examine parental disciplinary beliefs and practices within specific contextual frameworks.

Child Disciplining in Uganda

 In Uganda, high prevalence of child violence stems from societal acceptance of VAC, such as caning (Devries et al., 2014; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2018; Satinsky et al., 2023; Stavropoulos, 2006). This acceptance underlies harsh parental discipline (Lokot et al., 2020; Sui et al., 2017). For example, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development of Uganda (2018) reported that in 2015, half of Ugandan children experienced physically harsh discipline from a parent, caregiver, or adult relative. According to WHO (2020), 84% underwent violent disciplining in the month preceding the survey. Caregiver preferences for physically harsh discipline in rural Uganda are especially high among women (Satinsky et al., 2023). Harsh disciplinary methods in the Ugandan context include beating with objects, punching, denying food, forcing hard work, kicking, choking, burning, stabbing and locking or tying the child up (Stavropoulos, 2006). Boydell et al. (2017) found three categorical reasons in Uganda for discipling children: to establish respectable behavior, to establish necessary domestic practices and to protect children from health risks.

Several factors influencing the prevalence of harsh parental disciplinary practices need to be taken into consideration when studying this in Uganda. The *ecological systems theory*

by Bronfenbrenner (1981) provides a framework to examine how various factors operate at different ecological levels. These factors interact in the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem, influencing parental behavior. It contextualizes parental disciplinary beliefs and practices.

To start, at exolevel, it is a paramount that the constraints of poverty and material hardship are taken into consideration. Poverty is seen as a key challenge of Ugandan parents (Boydell et al., 2017). It increases parental stress and decreases parental responsiveness (van Es, 2015). Deprivation due to material hardship exacerbate reasons underlying harsh disciplining (Beckerman et al., 2017; Boydell et al., 2017).

Furthermore, at macrolevel, traditional family structures in Uganda are eroding due to urbanization, modernization and industrialization, all of which impact parental beliefs and practices. This societal transition leads to parenting becoming more of an individualized task rather than a communal responsibility (Annijas & de Bruin, 2009). Consequently, the use of harsh disciplinary methods by parents is rooted in this individualized approach to parenting, driven by their desire to maintain authority over their children amidst changing societal norms. The environmental context further exacerbates the negative effects of these changes on children's development, as feelings of lack of control increase in response to environmental risks (Jones & Prinz, 2005). For instance, as women's roles in the workforce evolve, parents in Uganda may perceive a decrease in parental control, leading to the adoption of harsh disciplining methods (Hoeffler et al., 2017).

Moreover, at chronolevel, the experienced war in Northern-Uganda should be taken into consideration since it is associated with VAC (Wieling et al., 2015a; 2015b). Research of families affected by war in Uganda stated that both the traumatic war exposure of female caregivers and children's own traumatic experiences were linked to instances of maltreatment reported by the children within the family (Saile et al., 2014).

Additionally, cultural contexts and societal attitudes must be considered for their impact on parental disciplinary beliefs and practices. Notably, definitions of challenging behavior vary across cultures, with obedience highly prized in LMICs, where family relationships are often interdependent (Park & Lau, 2015; Richter & Naicker, 2013). In Uganda, this is influenced by a focus on family respectability (Boydell et al., 2017; Wight et al., 2022). Moreover, as common in other LMICS, children in Uganda are valued more for their economic contributions than their psychological development, reflecting the economic hardships faced (van Es, 2015).

With this in mind, it should be noted that variations in disciplining across cultures involve not just parental practices but also the underlying motivations, which are important to consider when studying disciplining in LMICs. To illustrate, advising children and using violence for discipline is perceived positively in Uganda across different districts (Boothby et al., 2017). This can be an indication of cultural influences rather than a reflection of disruptions in parenting practices indicating cultural norms rather than disruptions in parenting practices (Möllerherm et al., 2019).

In societies where corporal punishment is widely accepted, its harmful effects may be somewhat diminished (Lansford et al., 2005). Despite this, employing strategies at any stage along this spectrum is linked to adverse developmental outcomes. Interventions could potentially change parental disciplinary beliefs and practices. Parenting programs could encourage caregivers to promote non-physical discipline strategies (Satinsky et al., 2023). Consequently, examining the influence of parenting programs introduced in Uganda becomes a compelling area for academic research. This research studied Help a Child's parenting program 'the Parenting Challenge'.

Parenting Programs on Disciplining

An important strategy in reducing violence in the society is to reduce parental VAC by implementing parenting programs. A parenting program is a structured process of education and training with the intention to improve parental skills of participants (Bunting, 2004). There has been an increased request and implementation of parenting programs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Aidoo, 2008 in van Es, 2015).

Parenting programs aimed to modify parenting practices associated with VAC seem successful and evidence is rooted in two theorical frameworks, *the social learning theory* (Bandura, 1971) and *the self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These theories can contextualize how parenting programs influence parental disciplining. Firstly, Bandura's social learning theory (1971) provides a foundation for such programs. Its core concept, self-efficacy, is defined as an individual's belief in their own capability to execute courses of action necessary to achieve specific goals, a critical element strengthened in parenting programs that also play a role in VAC prevention (McCoy et al., 2020; Sanders & Woolley, 2005). It highlights how parents acquire skills and practices through collective learning within these programs. Secondly, the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) focuses on intrinsic motivation, autonomy and competence and can explain how parenting programs shape parental behavior. Competence refers to the capability to effectively shape and control one's environment and to achieve desired outcomes.

The above-mentioned theories are interconnected, with compelling evidence linking parental self-efficacy (PSE) to parental competence (PC). Parents with higher PSE tend to exhibit more effective parenting when confronted with challenging child behavior (Jones & Prinz, 2005). PSE serves as a possible predictor of both PC and child functioning, making it a suitable target for intervention efforts. Changes in parenting are predicted by changes in PC (Deković et al., 2010). This aligns with observations in Liberia, Kenya, and Uganda, where

alterations in parenting practices have led to reductions in VAC (Hoeffler, 2017). It's important to note that PSE acts as a mediator, linking the ecological context to PC, underscoring the interconnectedness of the theories within the conceptual framework adopted in this study (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Despite prior evaluations suggesting that parenting programs can effectively reduce VAC by enhancing parenting skills, evidence remains limited in LMICs where harsh disciplining is more prevalent (Knerr et al., 2013). Research on parenting programs has predominantly focused on HICs, which are often categorized as WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) countries, despite the fact that WEIRD individuals represent some of the least typical populations for making generalizations about humans (Henrich et al., 2010). Nevertheless, studies conducted in LMICs in Kenya, Liberia and Uganda demonstrated promising results, indicating that parenting programs can lead to positive changes in parental beliefs and practices, thereby reducing VAC (Amollo, 2022; Hoeffler, 2017; van Es, 2015; van Esch & de Haan, 2017; van Trijp, 2016).

In order to study the appropriateness of developing new or transferring existing programs to LMICs, the socioeconomic, cultural and societal context need to be considered and cultural diversity needs to be acknowledged (Evans et al., 2008; Mejía et al., 2012; Pence & Nsamenang, 2008; Richter & Naicker, 2013). A parenting program in Uganda should therefore be adapted to the specific context.

The Parenting Challenge

Help a Child developed such a program, known as the Parenting Challenge program (PCP), for (non) biological parents who have (non) biological children under their care. The PCP aims to improve parenting skills of mothers, fathers and other caretakers in order for them to be able to provide adequate and relevant support to their children. This group-based

parenting program has been implemented in several countries including but not limited to East-Africa.

In Uganda, the PCP is implemented in collaboration with a local non-governmental organization, African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE), in several districts. This present study focuses on the PCP implemented in the Terego-West district. The PCP starts off with a 4-day Parenting Challenge Training (PCT), covering the six sessions of The Basics module. The PCT is offered by AEE community facilitators for approximately 60 parents per village. The Basics module contains exercises to raise awareness about the importance of parenting, including the topics: starting a parenting group; our own childhood; our children's childhood; we as parents; child development and the parental balance. After the PCT, the PCP continues and the Parenting Groups (PGs) come together for approximately 24 bimonthly group sessions covering the remaining modules. In this present study, I only focus on the 4-day PCT. Notably, the PCT does not include specific information on parental disciplinary practices.

Facilitators are guiding discussions rather than instructing, making PCP a bottom-up program, in line with Rogoff's *community of learners theory* (1994) which highlights the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the process of learning. In Northern-Uganda, this seems of great value in a parenting, suggesting that this theory could help explain the way parents learn through the PCP in this context (vandenDriessche, 2016). The PCP supports parents' active engagement in discussions, exercises, and group work and promotes conscientization of parenting through collective learning and a relational-communicative approach, essential for family functioning and effective parental disciplining, according to Help a Child.

Present Study

The present study seeks to improve the understanding of parenting interventions in Uganda, focusing on assessing Help a Child's The Basics training module of the PCP. To showcase the program's influence, Help a Child has initiated an evaluation study. This broader evaluation is geared towards improving the cultural resonance of the program, a critical aspect emphasized by Mejía et al. (2012), and gain insights into how it operates within Uganda's context.

Systemic reviews of parenting programs emphasize their impact on child functioning, overlooking changes in parenting practices (Deković et al., 2010; Barlow & Coren, 2018; Luoto et al., 2021; Mejía et al., 2012). With this study, I aim to fill this research gap by investigating how a parenting program influences parental practices. I attempt to show that the PCT, as starting point of the PCP, decreases the parental use of physically harsh disciplining through improving notions on parenthood and family dynamics.

The main question of this research is: ''How does participating in the Parenting Challenge in Uganda impact parental disciplinary beliefs and practices?''. Sub questions include (1) What beliefs do Ugandan parents express about the use of disciplining before and after completing The Basics module of the Parenting Challenge? and (2) What practices do parents in Uganda report regarding disciplining their children before and after completing The Basics module of the Parenting Challenge?

In this study, I take on a broad definition of parenting, including all adults providing care in the upbringing of children, regardless of their relativity to them. The focus of parenthood in non-WEIRD countries, such as Uganda, is less on the dyadic family structure and involves sharing primary care beyond the biological parents (Boydell et al., 2017; Keller, 2016). The study addresses previous methodological shortcomings in prior research on the effects of the PCP (e.g. no baseline data or poor reliability and validity of instruments) and underscores the importance of the program's influence on discipline, an area previously

identified as crucial for research (Ammerlaan, 2022; De Rooij, 2022; Dieleman, 2023; Hondelink, 2023).

First, I provide an overview of the method, including the research design, sample, instrument, procedure, data collection and data analysis. After this, the results are presented, followed by the discussion and conclusion.

Methods

Research Design

I employed a qualitative design to study the self-reported influence of the Parenting Challenge Training (PCT), which is The Basics module of the Parenting Challenge Program (PCP), on parental disciplinary beliefs and practices in Uganda. I chose qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the PCT's influence. I conducted semi-structured interviews in cooperation with three other researchers with participants both before (T1) and after (T2) completing the PCT 4-day training sessions. We used two assessments to demonstrate the robustness and credibility of this research, enhancing validity by measuring self-reported changes over time.

This research is a component of broader research into the influence of the complete PCP. Consequently, part of the data collection was not relevant to the analysis of this present study. The overarching research encompasses four topics which include (1) notions on parenthood; (2) family dynamics; (3) gender roles in parenting; and (4) child disciplining, the latter topic being the primary focus of the present study.

Sample

The complete sample of the broader researcher consisted of 103 caregivers and 206 interviews at T1 and T2. To enable an in-depth insight with the time available to write a master thesis, I selected 40 caregivers and thus 80 out of 206 interviews for in-depth data analysis, based on the depth and informativeness of their interviews. The selected sample

comprised (grand)parents in couple relationships (including eight widows) (n=39) as well as one single mother. The mean age of the participants was 42.48 years (SD=15.06). Sociodemographic characteristics of participants from the selected sample are detailed in Table 1 included in Appendix A.

Participants were approached for a mobilization day by community facilitators from AEE with the assistance of local council members (LCs), coordinated by the program coordinator. Selection criteria were based on participant availability and proximity regarding the fieldwork period to limit dropout rates. Participants were located in two villages in the West-Nile region, Terego district, Terego-West county, Katrini subcounty. This location was chosen since AEE operates there and the PCP had not been implemented in Katrini before, ensuring none of the respondents had prior participation in the PCP.

Instruments and Procedure

We developed a semi-structured interview instrument for pre-training assessment (see Appendix B) and post-training assessment (see Appendix C) in consultation with Utrecht University supervisors and AEE staff to ensure suitability. After approval, the instrument was translated to Lugbarati by an official translator.

At T1, the interview focused on parental beliefs and practices regarding (1) notions on parenthood; (2) family dynamics; (3) gender roles; and (4) child disciplining. Additional questions concerning the impact of the training on parents were included at T2. Table 2 outlines the questions analyzed during the interviews related to child disciplining. We conducted three test interviews to assess the instrument's cultural sensitivity, accuracy and comprehensibility. We did not include these in the data.

Table 2

Questions on Child Disciplining

T1	T2
According to you, what is good behavior of a child?	How do you view the behavior of your children?
What is bad behavior of a child?	In what situation do you discipline your children? Has this changed because of the Parenting Training?
What do you think of the behavior of your own children?	Did you learn something new on disciplining children?
What are factors contributing to a child's misbehavior?	Did the way you punish your children change?
When do you believe it is necessary to correct your children?	What methods are you planning to use in the future to discipline your children?
Why is it important to correct your children?	What role do others play in disciplining your children?
How do you correct your children when they do not behave according to what you expect?	
Are there other people who correct your children?	
How do others correct your children?	

Data Collection

Qualitative interview data was used which we collected between the 18th of March and the 24th of April 2024. We interviewed participants at baseline, before the start of the PCP and the PCT (T1) and two weeks after finishing the PCT (T2). After the PCT, the PCP continued in the form of PGs bimonthly meetings, which I left out of this present research. We engaged four translators to collaboratively conduct the interviews due to a lack of proficiency in Lugbarati and trained them to ensure accurate translation, minimize bias and get familiarized with the instrument. We instructed them not to introduce any value judgements into the translations. Most interviews were conducted in Lugbarati with the help of a translator. However, in the selected sample, two interviews were conducted in English since two parents were reasonably proficient in English language. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes and was conducted in a home (in village A) or at a church (village B), prioritizing confidentiality. Couples were interviewed separately.

Ethical Considerations

Both the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in Uganda and Faculty Ethics Review Committee (FETC) from Utrecht University approved the research. We informed participants about the research via an information letter and obtained their permission to participate through a consent form both during the mobilization day. We emphasized the voluntary nature of the participation and highlighted their right to withdraw from the interview at any point. We recorded the interviews with a secure recording device, and stored the data in YODA, a research data management service from Utrecht University, in accordance to the ethical procedures outlined by aforementioned ethics boards. Furthermore, the data underwent anonymization procedures by coding participants to safeguard against the identification of personal information.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data according to the research questions. We transcribed interviews in English through Amberscript, available at Utrecht University. We coded transcribed interviews using Nvivo, a qualitative research software program. We selected relevant topics for (1) notions on parenthood; (2) family dynamics; (3) gender roles in parenting; and (4) child disciplining. Based on the research question of present study, I used 80 interviews to familiarize with the data and select representative topics and concepts for the sub coding regarding child disciplining. Subsequently, I selected overarching themes to categorize codes. I quantified outcomes, when possible, to study differences between T1 and T2.

<center>**Results**</center>

To understand how participation in the Parenting Challenge (PCP) in Uganda influences parental disciplinary beliefs and practices, I analyzed 80 interviews conducted with 40 (grand)parents before (T1) and after (T2) completing The Basics module (PCT). After data-analysis I found significant processes of change at the household level concerning

disciplining practices, including (a) a transition towards advisory approaches; (b) shifts in communication strategies; and (c) changes regarding alternative disciplinary methods. Furthermore, I identified communal-level changes relevant to parental disciplining as reported by the participants. In this section, I present the results aligned with these key processes of change.

Effects on Parental Disciplinary Beliefs and Practices

Beating: a Shift to Advisory Approaches

The majority of parents reported a substantial reduction in the use of harsh disciplining following the training, expressing a change in how often, how intensely, and how quickly they resort to physical disciplinary methods for certain behaviors. At T1, beating was adopted mostly as a strategy to ensure that children would listen, perform duties, go to school or in case of theft. Beating was mainly performed with a stick on the buttocks, with the number of strokes varying depending on the misbehavior and theft being considered the worst offense. In addition, the emotional state of the parent determined the severity of the beating, like the T (translator) of parent 20 translated at T2: ''You will hope to model the, the, the child. But when you pick anger you can do…you can pick anything, just to harm the child''.

Post-training, 26 out of 40 parents reported (partly) abandoning the practice of beating, with 17 parents specifically mentioning now favoring advisory disciplinary approaches. From these 26 parents, 10 expressed their plan to quit beating completely. Initially, at T1, parents emphasized the use of the stick as a primary method of discipline, with other approaches following. While only one parent openly declared his intent to persist with beating as before, more than half acknowledged a decrease in its use. Nevertheless, 13 parents still viewed it as necessary in specific scenarios, such as children engaging in theft (*n*=4), attending disco dances (*n*=2), fighting with others (*n*=1). T explained what parent 19 said: ''He's not thinking that he will give his stroke to them again. Unless the worst thing when they, they, they go on

to pick something. They go and steal'' (T2). From those 13 parents, 3 mentioned to continue beating after advising for several times did not work.

Notably, the motivation behind the shift from physical punishment to an advisory approach lied in parent-centered considerations instead of child-centered considerations like the potential harm to the child. Parents expressed that they have come to understand that beating does not foster obedience; rather, it may desensitize children to it. Out of the 26 parents who stated to beat less, 15 did so because they observed that the adoption of a more advisory disciplinary approach led to better compliance and understanding, diminishing the need for physically harsh disciplining methods: ''When they don't listen to me, I beat their buttocks. But now, since they follow whatever I tell them, I don't beat them'' (T parent 22, T2). The fact that the potential harm to the child is overlooked by parents is exemplified by one parent talking about medical consequences of harsh disciplining who said:

> I will even cause a problem for me. Since the pain, I've told us, might beat a kid, whereby the kid will also do what? The kid will fall sick, whereby you will not have the money to take the kid to the hospital (parent 12, T2).

Despite motivations for this shift being parent-centered, the rationale behind the importance of disciplining children appeared to have shifted to a more future-oriented perspective since the training, reflecting a greater consideration for their children's future. To illustrate, T parent 8 expressed at T2:

> That whenever a child used to misbehave, he would get annoyed and just pick a stick and beat the child. (…) Giving them good advice so that when he will not be there in the future, they will be good people and stand on their own.

At T2, parents mentioned the wish for their children to prosper, which is the reason behind their disciplining strategies. Parents also showed this future oriented thinking by explaining how they used examples to discipline their children, underlining the prospected

outcomes if the children would behave accordingly like T parent 15 translated: ''my sisters, they are, they are working. They are well-off. They have TVs at home. […] I take my children, go and watch. After this 'Eh, mama, some people are like this.' I say if you study, your family will also be like this'' (T2).

Advising: a Shift in Communication Strategies

One of the most reported changes by the majority of parents was the adoption of more respectful communication with their children when resorting to advisory disciplinary approaches, resulting in positive behavior changes of children. Parents felt encouraged to adopt an advisory approach because of the training. This shift to respectful dialogue was echoed by the majority, noting that speaking to children in a polite manner led to better understanding and behavior among their children. This is illustrated by T parent 16:

> Even after she had already come to the training, she got more information of parenting, she consoled herself. [He,] she gave the advice verbal to the children. Now, she has come to know that she was shouting when giving the advice, after the training. These days, she's just telling them politely. That's how they have come to to get the information clear, knowing that that there is our mother, she's using the correct voice. That's why children have come to kneel down and get correct information. (T2).

Thus, in line with the results on beating as a disciplinary strategy, the motivation for this shift to respectful dialogue is explained by its effectiveness rather than by an underlying moral change.

Ten parents explained the underlying reasoning behind the shift to respectful dialogue by expressing that they experience less anger, causing them to communicate differently. T parent 2 explained: ''Before they were not happy. They were just in a way of quarreling every time. But now she doesn't have that anger in her heart'' (T2). This reflected a self-reported emotional transformation that influenced their overall approach to disciplining.

Communication strategies adopted since the training also included incorporating teaching and family meetings. Half of the parents reported teaching their children about the training and having family meetings more often, discussing various topics with their children more frequently.

Besides changes in their communication style and frequency, there is also a shift in the content they discussed with their children, according to 10 parents. For example, in order to ensure the children would understand them better and thus listen better, three parents mentioned communicating about their issues with their children and explaining any parental behavior causing the child to misbehave. T parent 5 explained:

He learned how to talk to them. These days he doesn't like if they are not understanding, then he calls them and explain to them. Maybe like those school fees which are in high secondary, he cannot afford at once. So he explains to them to understand him. Now currently they are trying to understand him, that he has nothing. (T2).

Notably, post-training advice takes on a more future-focused tone. Five parents expressed to integrate concrete examples into their advising at T2, aimed to inspire their children to align their behavior accordingly. Moreover, eight parents related disciplinary issues to a concern for their children's future following the training, like T parent 7 translated: ''He's stopping them from all those things so that they can grow well and stand on their own when he's not there, or when he's old''(T2).

Other Methods: a Shift to Food, Education and Religion

While the majority predominantly discussed corporal punishment and advising as disciplinary strategies during baseline, six parents also mentioned employing dietary discipline, either by withholding or conversely providing food. More rare cases involved a parent locking up the child, a parent threatening the child with fire, and three parents pulling

the ears of their children. In addition, rewarding the child and loving the children is mentioned once.

As parental disciplinary practices evolved post-training, the focus shifted towards addressing the fundamental needs of children, as exemplified by the emphasis on proper nutrition. At baseline, parents mentioned hunger as a reason for children to show misbehavior: ''when they don't provide food, sometimes they can cry. They can also develop bad behaviors'' (T parent 15, T1). Subsequently, a dietary disciplinary approach is vocalized by six parents to correct their children. Post-training, parents expressed increased awareness of the significance of proper nutrition for children. One parent linked this to the prior misbehavior of her child(ren), explained by T parent 2: ''That before...maybe it was because of hunger. Because the the husband now provides this time there's food. They are now okay. They don't disturb her like before'' (T2).

One parent did not realize hunger could be causing misbehavior and came to this conclusion after the training. This parent, who initially withholded food as a form of discipline, mentioned that she had stopped, citing the following rationale:

> I learn about that. It means when the kid is not doing something which I doesn't like, I
> will not punish the kid by not giving the kid the food, because there it can make a kid
> to be what? To be a thief. Whereby the kid will go somewhere else, over in
> somebody's garden, getting a cassava, because the kid is hungry (parent 12, T2).

As parental disciplinary practices changed, parents reported the adoption of alternative disciplinary methods such as purchasing items, engaging in play and modeling good behavior. Besides, the majority emphasized the importance of religion and education in the second interview, for example: ''I discipline my children about school. To make sure they educated. I even give them some knowledge at home. And also I make sure I take them to church. They learn about God'' (T parent 15, T2). At T2, many parents emphasized the significance of

education and religion in upbringing as a form of discipline. At T1, religion as a disciplinary method was a topic mentioned only by one parent. Meanwhile at T2, 10 parents vocalized the importance of teaching children about religion when asked about disciplining strategies, like: 'Then he's talking about uh it is necessary uh to correct children in a spiritual aspect'' (T parent 19, T2). By correcting children spiritually, through teaching them about religion, parents hope their children will grow up fearing God, exhibiting good behavior.

At T1, six parents perceive schooling primarily as a method of discipline due to the presence of teachers and regulations, which lead to punishments and, consequently, corrected behavior. While the importance of schooling as a disciplinary tool is occasionally mentioned at T1, the underlying rationale appears to shift over time. At T2, eleven parents express a more future-oriented view on education as disciplining method, emphasizing the desire for a prosperous future for their children, focusing on the acquisition of knowledge to foster good behavior.

Notably, the significance of education and religion in disciplining is underscored by parents not only by moral incentives but also by the notion that children would have fewer opportunities for misbehavior when they are engaged in educational activities and attending church services. For example, T parent 5 translated: ''That he learned. That was maybe like giving those children a chance to go to the church. Maybe for Sunday school, maybe for for for other activities in church so that they cannot go and do bad things'' (T2).

In conclusion, parents reported a consistent shift from physical methods, like beating, to more communicative approaches when discipling their children. The majority of parents began to employ verbal advice, with more than half mentioning doing this instead of resorting to physical disciplining methods. Subsequently, the majority of parents expressed a decrease in misbehavior of their children, underlining certain positive behavioral changes amongst

their children. Almost half of the parents highlighted this decrease in misbehavior as the reason to beat less.

Effects on Communal Beliefs and Practices

The atmosphere in the community is often discussed by the respondents in relation to discipline. Besides reporting changes in communication approaches on household level, parents expressed changes regarding the interactions at community level. Almost all parents, 37 out of 40, reported that the training has led to improvements within their community on several levels, fostering more positive behaviors regarding both themselves as other community members. Parents report that these community-wide changes positively impact the behavior of their children as well, which impacts their disciplinary approaches.

To start, parents reported being equipped to manage conflicts and interact peacefully with neighbors and family members resulting in less fighting (*n*=12). They learned to 'know how to stay with the people' (*n*=9). They reported that they are now greeting each other by shaking hands (*n*=4), unlike before, with neighbors consciously forgiving each other after the training (*n*=2), as explained by T parent 28: ''they were apologizing for what they have wrongly been ignorantly doing without the training they are now for, uh, forgiving one another'' (T2).

Parents find their community members are more patient, respectful and community-oriented, leading to six parents mentioning love for the community and six parents comparing it to before:

> And then he also learned about to how they can stay together, which was not there
> before. Because those days, people used to stare everyone on their own. No one is
> bothered about the other. But he learned that people should learn to stay together (T
> parent 9, T2).

Consequently, parents (*n*=10) expressed a strengthened sense of unity and social control (*n*=9) within their communities, since people are advising (*n*=9) and supporting (*n*=8) each other, rather than engaging in disputes (*n*=12) and gossiping (*n*=3). For example, at T2, parent 3 said:

> We are just sharing things which we discussed here with the neighbors. Now, if I just realized that my colleague who is not attending the, the training here, is not going well. Is he, is he doing something wrong? Maybe [with the] child or quarrelling with the husband. I just advise them, because I learned a lot from here.

Specifically, parents reported advising each other regarding drinking habits since the training, with 22 parents noting a decrease in alcohol consumption among community members compared to baseline. Twelve parents mentioned drinking less alcohol themselves. Individuals who previously engaged in drinking-related quarrels and yelling have become more responsible, both self- reported and as noted by their neighbors, explained by T parent 21: ''The neighbors were drinking. They were coming yelling. It [is] no[t] there now. He's giving the example of (name), (name) was shouting. These days [name] is not drinking now. That's neighbor to her. That's the great change to her'' (T2). Parents expressed the importance for this increased social control and sense of unity. For example, T parent 15 translated at T2:

> That one, it is important. You are always advised by someone else. By yourself, you will not learn. You may think you're doing the right thing, but you are not doing the right thing. Someone will come and tell you: (…) what you are doing is not okay. You leave this one. You go and do the other one. So it will make one to learn.

Although not everyone has stopped entirely, there is a general self-reported trend towards moderation with participants reallocating money previously spent on alcohol, prioritizing family needs more. As a result of these social and economic improvements, parents perceived that their environment has become calmer.

This increased unity within the community has not only led to an increased sense of collective responsibility for disciplining community members, but also for each other's children. Parents reported that neighbors play a more active role in disciplining and guiding children since the training, because all the members are now ''equipped with the knowledge of parenting'' (T parent 29, T2) which led to change. This is confirmed with other parents, who noted for example: ''As the gospel has been spread to the community. Each and every parent is is giving advice to their children that all their children around here are now modeled'' (T parent 22, T2). However, the frequency of beating in this involvement is not clear.

In conclusion, the above-mentioned shift to communicational approaches is not limited to the household level, as the parenting program has fostered a stronger community, with improved relationships and reduced conflicts, according to the majority of parents.

Discussion

In this study, I investigate the self-reported influence of The Basics module training (PCT), the starting point of the Parenting Challenge program (PCP), on parental disciplinary beliefs and practices among Ugandan parents in the West-Nile region. With the study, I aim to demonstrate that the PCT decreases the parental use of physically harsh disciplining towards children through improving notions on parenthood and family dynamics.

Initially, parents report physical disciplinary methods mentioned by Stavropoulos (2006) including beating, denying food, forcing hard work and locking up the child. Consistent with prior research in Uganda, parents favor these methods due to their perceived effectiveness in establishing respectable behavior and necessary domestic practices (Annijas & de Bruin, 2009; Boydell et al., 2017; Njogu, 2007). A lack of knowledge on alternative disciplinary methods among Ugandan parents is highlighted by researchers addressing the

need to focus on parental guidance as a means to diminish the risk of child maltreatment (Kamonges, 2020; Njogu, 2007; Wight et al., 2022).

Interestingly, this study suggests promising results, with the key finding being a shift from physical to advisory disciplinary approaches post-training, indicating a positive impact of the PCT. Parents found advisory approaches more effective in positively correcting behavior following the training, leading to a change in their initial preferences. These findings are consistent with prior program evaluations targeting VAC and intimate partner violence (e.g. Ashburn et al., 2016; Sui et al., 2024). However, in contrast with those programs, the PCT manual does not explicitly address VAC or effective disciplinary approaches. Therefore, findings of current study raise intriguing questions regarding the nature of this shift.

Parental Disciplinary Beliefs and Practices

A possible explanation for the reported changes lies in the improved communication skills acquired through the training, which enhance parental self-efficacy (PSE) and competence (PC), potentially leading to fewer familial conflicts. As the Ugandan society evolves due to modernization, an erosion of parental control becomes evident. Diminished social connectedness and a discrepancy between modernization and tradition may lead children to display disobedience, increasing the frequency of household conflicts (Annijas & de Bruin, 2009; Kuteesa-van der Veen, 2017; Levine, 2003). Ineffective disciplining practices mediate the relationship between these child misbehaviors and PC (Slagt et al., 2012). This indicates that parents' perceptions of PC influence their disciplinary approaches and that PC and parenting behaviors mutually influence each other. Parents who feel less confident are more likely to use harsh parenting practices and tent to perceive their children as more difficult (Deković et al., 2010; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Sanders & Woolley, 2005).

Parents report feeling equipped with skills on effective communication strategies, diminishing familial conflict. The majority perceives advisory approaches effective in

promoting obedience post-training, leading to a reduction in parent-child conflict. Parents report using a calmer tone of voice and less anger when communicating with their children, which may explain the effectiveness and thus the new preference for the advisory approach. Consequently, conflicts no longer seem to escalate to the point where they feel it necessary to resort the physical disciplinary practices such as beating. To add, parents report a decrease in interparental conflict, which is linked to harsh discipling in earlier research (Ashburn et al., 2016; Beckerman et al., 2017; Wight et al., 2022). Overall, the shift in disciplinary approaches may be attributed to communication skills acquired during the PCT, allowing parents to change their perception of their own capabilities, increasing PSE and PC and reducing familial conflict.

Communal Beliefs and Practices

Another perspective suggests that parental disciplinary beliefs and practices are altered due to changes on community level. VAC is deeply intertwined with societal issues, highlighting the importance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1981) evaluating parenting programs. It underscores the connection between individuals, like parents, and their surroundings, illustrating how community-level changes may influence parental disciplinary practices.

Parents frequently mention communal changes when discussing discipling strategies. Following the training, parents note a transformation in community dynamics characterized by increased positive social interactions, stricter social norms, and reduced alcohol consumption, which in turn reduces quarreling and fighting among community members. Parents report a strengthened sense of unity. Consequently, the calmer community environment leads to decreased parental anger and subsequently influences disciplinary approaches.

By contextualizing these findings within this framework, a deeper understanding is gained of the interplay between parental disciplinary behavior and communal factors. This interplay is highlighted by earlier research in Uganda, demonstrating that the loss of communal cohesion impacts disciplinary control methods (Annijas & de Bruin, 2009). It underlines the need for community-based programs to prevent VAC (Amollo et al., 2022; Vandendriessche, 2016). As results of current study indicate, this shifts away from violent disciplining methods, with the community now adopting this new approach while holding each other accountable.

A note of caution here is due as results indicate that harsh disciplinary methods are often influenced by household insecurities. Parents report that children's misbehavior frequently stems from hunger or lack of necessities. Prior studies in Africa (Hillis et al., 2016; Mudany et al., 2013; Nkuba et al., 2018; Satinsky et al., 2023) highlight how these conditions lead to shifting responsibilities, increased parental stress, and subsequent changes in child behavior. Parents note that parental stress, compounded by financial strain, often leads to harsher discipline toward demanding children, aligning with earlier findings (Annijas & de Bruin, 2009; Mudany et al., 2013). As poverty is still there, the findings may raise questions on what makes the training plausible for parents to change their disciplining behavior.

Despite persistent poverty, the PCP shows promise in a transition from violent to non-violent disciplining. It may alleviate parental stress by fostering stronger household and community ties. It is relevant to get more insight into the topics parenting programs should focus on. Even if programs like the PCP do not explicitly focus on VAC, they may influence PSE and PC which are predictors of discipline style as program evaluations show (Sanders & Woolley, 2005). Parenting programs that enable parents to generalize skills both within the home and community appear particularly promising in shifting away from violent disciplining.

Limitations

       This study has several limitations. The involvement of multiple researchers and translators in the data collection may influence the results. Certain inquiries might not be consistently posed, and certain terms might be translated with variance. Therefore, interpreting the quantified data requires caution, as it may not consistently reflect the occurrence of specific changes. Nevertheless, the methodological framework includes a comprehensive review of the instrument to minimize bias to the greatest extent possible.

       While parents express a change in disciplinary practices, social desirability bias remains a limitation when using interview instruments in evaluative research, as conclusions can solely be drawn based on self-reported changes. However, the extensive data collection process allows for a thorough analysis, strengthened by the use of qualitative interviews, enabling a contextual insight into parental disciplinary practices and beliefs. The substantial participant group offers a robust foundation for data analysis. Therefore, while social desirability bias remains a consideration, the robustness of the participant group helps counteract its potential impact on the study outcomes.

       Besides social desirability bias, it's crucial to acknowledge potential researcher bias, as we are Western, white women, which may influence parental engagement in the PCT. Some parents specifically refer to this background when discussing the importance of the training. This bias is also relevant in data interpretation.

Recommendations

       Despite the promising results, the longer-term impact of the PCP remains uncertain as the post-training interviews took place two weeks after completing the PCT. Further research is needed to examine the impact of the complete PCP on parental disciplinary beliefs and practices.

To develop a full picture of the communal change, future research is required to investigate how communal changes affect parental disciplinary beliefs and practices in various contexts. Although the majority mention communal changes, the frequency and nature of discussing these changes varied across villages depending on the conversation and researcher, raising concerns about the effect in other contexts. As communal changes emerged unexpectedly as a topic related to disciplining, in future studies there is room for further exploration by incorporating this into the research design.

Besides, several other recommendations are given for the development of the instrument design. To start, the preference in order of methods could be included in the instrument to further deepen the understanding of this topic, as parents still mention to beat in certain occasions. Also, using several terms to question parental disciplinary beliefs and practices is recommended since 'disciplining', 'correcting' and 'punishing' seem to provide variations in answers. Besides, as a shift from beating to advisory approaches is reported by parents, additional research is needed to better understand the contents of the advice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aims to assess the impact of The Basics module of the Parenting Challenge on parental disciplinary beliefs and practices in Uganda's West-Nile region. The findings indicate a shift from physical to advisory disciplinary approaches following the training, underscoring the influence of the program in fostering positive changes in parenting dynamics. Moreover, the study highlights the unintended yet crucial role of communal changes in influencing parental disciplinary practices, echoing Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The self-reported transformation in the community atmosphere characterized by increased social interactions and reduced conflicts reflects the interconnectedness between parental behavior and communal factors. Despite the promising outcomes, I suggest further research to assess the program's long-term impact and delve

deeper into the influence of communal changes on parental disciplinary practices. I recommend exploring the contents of advisory approaches and integrating communal change assessment into instrument design. This study contributes valuable insights into the complex interplay between parental disciplining, community dynamics, and parenting programs, paving the way for more effective and culturally sensitive parenting programs in similar contexts.

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Appendix A: Sample Descriptives

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants From the Selected Sample

Nr.	Gender	Age	Marital status	Spouse attended training	(Grand) parent	Children undercare	Age range children	Educational level parent
1	Female	39	Married	Yes	Parent	4, *5*	5 – 13	Primary 4
2	Female	32	Married	Yes	Parent	5	3 – 12	Primary 6
3	Female	35	*Married	Yes	Parent	5, *2*	0 – 17	Senior 4
4	Female	48	Married	Yes	Parent	6, *3*	8 – 20	Primary 4
5	Male	49	Married	Yes	Parent	5	12 – 25	Primary 7
6	Male	49	Married	Yes	Parent	8, *1*	1 – 21	Primary 6
7	Male	50	Married	Yes	Parent	8, *1*	4 – 14	Primary 7
8	Male	40	*Married	*Yes	Parent	9, *3*	1 – 21	Primary 6
9	Male	65	Married	Yes	Grandparent	11, *5*	9 – 34	Primary 7
10	Male	36	*Married	*Yes	Parent	6, *1*	0 – 17	Primary 5
11	Female	35	Married	Yes	Parent	2	3 – 6	Unknown
12	Female	25	Married	Yes	Parent	2, *4*	2 – 4	Senior 4

Nr.	Gender	Age	Marital status	Spouse attended training	(Grand) parent	Children undercare	Age range children	Educational level parent
13	Female	25	Married	No	Parent	3	2 – 7	Unknown
14	Female	21	Married	No	Parent	1	9	Primary 4
15	Female	28	Married	Yes	Parent	4	1 – 10	Primary 5
16	Female	28	Married	No	Parent	4	0 – 14	Unknown
17	Male	27	Married	Yes	Parent	3, *1*	1 – 5	Senior 4
18	Male	24	Married	Yes	Parent	2, *1*	1 – 12	Primary 5
19	Male	37	Married	Yes	Parent	2	3 – 6	Primary 5
20	Male	46	Married	Unknown	Parent	7	7 – 24	Primary 6
21	Female	74	Married	No	Grandparent	1	Unknown	Unknown
22	Female	56	Widow	-	Grandparent	5	<4 – 14	No level
23	Female	38	Widow	-	Parent	6	9 – 20	No level
24	Female	39	Married	No	Parent	7	5 – 24	Primary 2
25	Female	34	Married	Yes	Parent	2, *1*	5 – 18	Primary 4
26	Female	43	Married	No	Parent	2	2 – 5	Unknown
27	Female	57	Married	No	Both	1, *2*	2 – 15	Unknown

Nr.	Gender	Age	Marital status	Spouse attended training	(Grand) parent	Children undercare	Age range children	Educational level parent
28	Female	20	Married	Yes	Parent	2, *1*	0 – 12	Unknown
29	Female	41	Widow	-	Parent	7	4 – 23	No level
30	Female	44	Widow	-	Parent	8, *1*	UK	Primary 2
31	Female	28	Married	No	Parent	5	3 – 13	Primary 4
32	Female	24	Married	No	Parent	4	<3 – 6	Primary 2
33	Female	65	Widow	Yes	Grandparent	3	7 – 14	Unknown
34	Female	74	Widow	Yes	Grandparent	1	UK	No level
35	Female	30	Separated	-	Parent	3	3 – 9	Primary 5
36	Female	60	Widow	-	Parent	2	14/15	No level
37	Female	62	*Widow	-	Parent	2	13 – 15	Primary 3
38	Male	54	*Married	*Yes	Both	10, *8*	13 – 32	Primary 7
39	Male	48	Married	Yes	Parent	2, *3*	16 – 22	Primary 4
40	Male	69	Married	No	Parent	2	? – 12	Unknown

Note. All in italic refer to additional non-biological children of the parent. *Married refers to polygamous. *Yes means one out of multiple spouses attended the training.

Appendix B: Pre-training Instrument

Through observation

1. What is the sex of the parent? (male/female)

2. What village is the parent situated?

Background information

3. How old are you?

    a. If the parent does not know, ask: Could you give an estimation of your age?

4. What is your highest level of education?

5. What is your marital status? (married/separated/single/widowed)

    a. If singe or separated: Is the father of the children in any way involved in the care of your biological children?

6. How many children are under your care?

    a. How many boys/girls?

7. How many of them are your biological children?

    a. Are you the parent or grandparent?

    b. From your biological children, what is the age of your oldest child?

    c. From your biological children, what is the age of your youngest child?

General question

8. Did you hear about the Parenting Training before?

    a. If so, what did you hear? And from whom?

Notions on parenthood

9. What is a good parent?

10. What is a bad parent?

11. Are there specific roles for fathers?

12. Are there specific roles for mothers?

13. What is the role of the child?

14. What are your visions/dreams as a parent?

15. What do you think your children need from you?

16. What do you do in daily life to support your children?

17. Do you feel you are fulfilling your role as a parent?

18. What are challenges you face as a parent?

Family dynamics

19. How do you communicate to your child that there is a problem?

20. How do you communicate to your partner that there is a problem?

21. When there is a problem within the household, how do you solve this with your partner?

22. Are there other people involved in the upbringing of your children?

    a.   How are they involved/what do they do?

    b.   Who lives on your compound?

23. Do your biological children live with you?

24. Are there challenges in upbringing your children together with the other people you mentioned?

    a.   If so, what challenges can you describe?

Disciplining

25. According to you, what is good behavior of a child?

26. What is bad behavior of a child?

27. What do you think of the behavior of your own children?

28. What are factors contributing to a child's misbehavior?

29. When do you believe it is necessary to correct your children?

30. Why is it important to correct your children?

31. How do you correct your children when they do not behave according to what you expect?

32. Are there other people who correct your children?

    a. How do others correct your children?

Community of learners

33. Who taught you to be a parent?

    a. In what way?

Appendix C: Post-training Instrument

General questions for evaluation of the Parenting Training

1. How would you describe the Parenting Training to another parent who does not know about the training?

2. What did you learn from the Parenting Training?

    a. What was the most important lesson for you?

3. Did you talk with your partner / other caregivers in your household about the Parenting Training?

    a. What did you talk about?

4. Was there something you enjoyed about the Parenting Training? If so, what was this?

5. What did you not enjoy about the Parenting Training?

    a. Did you miss something in the training?

6. What would you advise on how to improve the Parenting Training?

    a. Are there topics you would like to add?

Notions on parenthood

7. Did you learn something new on what is a good parent?

8. Did you learn something new on what is a bad parent?

9. Did you learn something new on the role of the father?

10. Did you learn something new on the role of the mother?

11. Did you learn something new on the role of the child?

12. What do you think your children need from you?

    a. Was there something new/surprising in the training that you learned?

13. What do you do in daily life to support your children?

    a. Are there behaviors that you left/introduced?

14. Did the Parenting Training help you with the challenges you face as a parent?

    a.   If so, how?

15. Do you feel like you are fulfilling your role as a parent?

    a.   Is this different from before?

16. Did your visions/dreams as a parent change after the training?

Family dynamics

17. Did the Parenting Training change the way you interact/communicate with your

partner?

    a.   How do you communicate to your partner that there is a problem?

18. Did the Parenting Training change the way you interact/communicate with your

children?

    a.   How do you communicate to your child that there is a problem?

19. Are there others involved in the upbringing of your children?

    a.   Did this change after the training?

Disciplining

20. How do you view the behavior of your children?

21. In what situation do you discipline your children?

    a.   Has this changed because of the Parenting Training?

22. Did you learn something new on disciplining children?

23. Did the way you punish your children change?

24. What methods are you planning to use in the future to discipline your children?

25. What role do others play in disciplining your children?

Community of learners

26. From whom did you learn about parenting during the training?

27. Do you think the group or other people is/are important for learning about parenting?

28. Would you like to keep learning about parenting in the future?

a.   If so, how?