



# Discipline and Violence: Exploring the Paradox of Structure and Calmness as Disciplinary Tools.

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## ABSTRACT

Discipline is not about yelling, beating and showing power over a helpless being. Discipline is structure. Structure here refers to a precise, concise, daily schedule, which is based on certain principles, initiated and modelled by the tutelary guardians of the children. The schedule in this case should be well planned and workable. This schedule inculcates responsibility in the children. Children thrive under responsibility. The tutelary guardian leads by example. Children will learn the behaviour you want to enforce when you do not contradict by your actions. Learning is a step-by-step process from easy to complex. So tutelary guardians should strategize their structure in the same manner. Teach and lead the behaviour to be enforced. It should be noted that children are visual learners. Children do not understand why instructions show that it is wrong to insult people and fight yet the instructor usually calls them, 'big head', 'dull thing'. In addition, some tutelary guardians watch violent movies with pleasure in the presence of children and even make statements like, 'he should have hit him harder on the face. He is a weakling'. Children get violent from comments made, violent actions endorsed and what they see. These are violent principles that are modelled to the children which will eventually cause them to be violent and irresponsible human beings. A better society will begin from the tutelary guardian who is knowledgeable in the areas of structure and calmness. The objective of this paper was to ascertain if and how structure with calmness could be effective tools for discipline. The research questions were: Is structure with calmness an effective tool for discipline? And how can structure with calmness be used as an effective tool for discipline? The present paper was quantitative. The paper discussed the dichotomy between discipline and violence. Structure and calmness were also discussed as tools for discipline. The opportunity sampling method were used to collect data from 61 parents, 25 students and 21 teachers. Research instruments used were questionnaires, and observation. Findings were analyzed using the calming cycle theory by Welch and Ludwig (2016). The findings showed that structure and calmness were vital tools for discipline as opposed to yelling and beating.

## Résumé

La discipline ne consiste pas à crier, à frapper et à exercer son pouvoir sur un être sans défense. La discipline est une question de structure. La structure fait ici référence à un emploi du temps quotidien précis et concis, basé sur certains principes, initié et modelé par les tuteurs des enfants. Dans ce cas, l'emploi du temps doit être bien planifié et réalisable. Cet emploi du temps inculque le sens des responsabilités aux enfants. Les enfants s'épanouissent lorsqu'on leur confie des responsabilités. Le tuteur montre l'exemple. Les enfants apprendront le comportement que vous souhaitez leur inculquer si vous ne le contredisez pas par vos actions. L'apprentissage est un processus graduel, allant du plus simple au plus complexe. Les tuteurs doivent donc élaborer leur structure de la même manière. Enseignez et montrez l'exemple du comportement à adopter. Il convient de noter que les enfants apprennent de manière visuelle. Ils ne comprennent pas pourquoi on leur dit qu'il est mal d'insulter les gens et de se battre, alors que l'instructeur les traite généralement de « grosse tête » ou d'« idiot ». De plus, certains tuteurs regardent avec plaisir des films violents en présence des enfants et font même des commentaires tels que « il aurait dû le frapper plus fort au visage. C'est un faible ». Les enfants deviennent violents à cause des commentaires qui sont faits, des actions violentes qui sont approuvées et de ce qu'ils voient. Ce sont là des principes violents qui sont inculqués aux enfants et qui finiront par faire d'eux des êtres humains violents et irresponsables. Une société meilleure commencera par les tuteurs qui connaissent bien les domaines de la structure et du calme. L'objectif de cet article était de déterminer si et comment la structure et le calme pouvaient être des outils efficaces pour la discipline. Les questions de recherche étaient les suivantes : la structure et le calme sont-ils des outils efficaces pour la discipline ? Et comment la structure et le calme peuvent-ils être utilisés comme outils efficaces pour la discipline ? Le présent article était quantitatif. Il traitait de la dichotomie entre discipline et violence. La structure et le calme ont également été abordés en tant qu'outils de discipline. La méthode d'échantillonnage aléatoire a été utilisée pour collecter des données auprès de 61 parents, 25 élèves et 21 enseignants. Les instruments de recherche utilisés étaient des questionnaires et l'observation. Les résultats ont été analysés à l'aide de la théorie du cycle apaisant de Welch et Ludwig (2016). Les résultats ont montré que la structure et le calme étaient des outils essentiels pour la discipline, contrairement aux cris et aux coups.

## INTRODUCTION

The theme of this paper is discipline and violence. In our society today, violence is usually mistaken for discipline. Some parents, teachers, and those in authorities, inflict pain on their children, students, and subordinates in the name of discipline (Redman and Fletcher, 2022; Ologe, 2018, 2019; Wyk and Chifamba, 2019). This is to say, they torture those they intend to discipline physically, emotionally and psychologically, with the hope to correct a behaviour. Some go as far as quoting Bible verses to back up their actions. This torture is repeated severally on the victims and consequently replayed severally in their minds. The victims on their part repeat the torture consciously or unconsciously on others. Eventually, torture becomes cyclical and it is normalized in the eyes of the society.

Contrary to the popular opinion that beating a child is part of our African culture, anthropologists, sociologists and other researchers have proven that it is not (Wyk and Chifamba, 2019; Ologe, 2019). A child in Africa, before colonialism was a demi god. It was believed that children brought a lot of fortune to the family. A child makes a marriage stronger and aids in the continuity of the family name and values (Dyer, 2007). No parent dared to hit a child. They used several routines and strategies to discipline children. "We need to get back to traditional practices of how children were raised, teaching values through storytelling and illustration" (Sonia Vohito). Beating came as a result of colonialism to exercise control. This beating was copied from the slave drivers and was initially resisted by African societies. Beating is violence and it is counterproductive, "hitting children contributes to

domestic and community violence and can even reduce children's intellectual capacity (Wyk and Chifamba, 2019).

Discipline and violence are two concepts that are often intertwined, yet paradoxically, they can also be mutually exclusive. On one hand, discipline is often associated with the maintenance of order, control, and stability, which are essential for promoting learning, growth, and social cohesion. On the other hand, violence is a destructive force that can undermine these very same goals, leading to harm, trauma, and social fragmentation (Thorsborne, M., & Vinegrad, D. 2014).

Despite this apparent paradox, many educational institutions, organizations, and societies continue to rely on disciplinary tools that are rooted in structures of power, control, and punishment. These tools can sometimes perpetuate violence, either physically, emotionally, or psychologically, which can have devastating consequences for individuals and communities, Benbenishty, R., & Astor, R. A. (2005).

However, there is a growing recognition that discipline and violence are not inevitable bedfellows. In fact, research has shown that calmness, empathy, and understanding can be powerful disciplinary tools that promote positive behaviour, social responsibility, and emotional intelligence. This approach to discipline is rooted in the understanding that individuals are not inherently "bad" or "defiant," but rather, they are complex beings who require guidance, support, and compassion to thrive, Olweus, D. (1993).

This study aims to explore the paradox of structure and calmness as disciplinary tools, examining the tensions and contradictions between these two approaches. By investigating the ways in which discipline and violence intersect, and how calmness and empathy can be used as alternative disciplinary tools, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between discipline, violence, and human behaviour.

## **Conceptualising Discipline, Violence and Calmness**

### **Discipline**

Discipline is teaching or training. "The word discipline comes from the Latin word *discipulus* (pupil) and from discipline teaching" (Krishnan, 2009 in Hammarfelt, 2018). This means a behaviour or principle is taught repeatedly and internalized "power at command; mastery of the resources available for carrying through the action undertaken" (Dewey, 1944). What this means is that to be disciplined is to be able to master available resources. We cannot master unless we learn; and we learn what we have been taught (available resources). In the present paper, discipline is viewed as a principle that is taught, internalized and consequently applied. Violence The World Health Organization in the WRVH defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Rutherford et al, 2007). WRVH is the World Report on Violence and Health.

Rutherford et al, 2007 see violence as a public health problem. Following this definition, we can see that inflicting pain on another person for whatever reason, leads to health hazards. The question now is, must we risk the mental and physical health of another person in order to achieve a certain goal when there could be better ways to achieve that same goal? O' Moore and Minton (2004) define violence as "aggressive behaviour, that may be physically, sexually or emotionally abusive." This is the kind of behaviour that some parents, teachers and other tutelary guardians exhibit in the name of discipline. Violence compels the child to obey without a personal conviction. Thus, not much is learned if something is learned at all. Consequently other health hazards like trauma, follow in the long run. This paper views violence as beating, insulting, shaming and other forms of inflicting pain on a person. "Lasting authority is respect and trust, not force and control (Ologe, 2019).

### **Structure**

Dixon, 1972 describes structure as "the energy of process". He emphasizes that structure is not separate from content. What this means is that structure is a process and that process must be filled with content. In this light, the tutelary guardian should teach what to do

and how to do it and the actions should be done in the form of a routine. What to do and how to do it, is the content. Process is therefore the routine. Going through the process with the children is retainable and better than just giving orders. This is because children learn better from what they live than from what they hear (Nolte and Harris, 1998; Gelman, 2009). Instructions may not be sufficient and could also be complicated for them to understand.

### **Calmness**

Calmness is a state of being peaceful. This is when a person's emotions are in control. Using any form of violence, whether beating or yelling is a quick fix (Ologe, 2021). Tutelary guardians use violence because they have refused to work on their emotions. The present paper demonstrates that teaching principles through consistent routines in an atmosphere of calmness, will be a better disciplinary strategy rather than using violence. The truth is, violence invokes fear on the victim. Secondly, continuous fear leads to an amygdala hijack. "The amygdala is a core structure in the anterior medial temporal lobe, with an important role in several brain functions involving memory, emotion, perception, social cognition, and even awareness" (Dominguez-Borràs and Vuilleumier, 2022). "If the stressful situation causes strong feelings of anxiety, anger, aggression, or fear, this can result in illogical and irrational overreactive behaviours to be displayed (Guy - Evans, 2021). This goes further to illustrate that violence may result in obedience at the moment but it is dangerous to the child.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for the study was the calming cycle theory by Welch and Ludwig (2016). This theory purports that "the quality of emotional behavioural interactions between the mother and infant/child is shaped by and regulated by bottom-up processes that are mediated by co-conditioning mechanisms" (Welch, 2016). These co-conditioning mechanisms include: listening, holding, eye contact, singing, amongst others. Welch believes that "for important biological reasons, healthy emotional behaviour of the infant/child begins by establishing and/or maintaining emotional connection and visceral/autonomic co-regulation with the mother." Her study examined the emotional relationship between mothers and their babies in the neonatal intensive care unit, mothers and their 36-week-old babies, 4-month-old babies and a 4-year-old son. Another study by Welch et al (2006) showed improved behavioural patterns among 102 older children with behavioural disorders, using prolonged parent - child embrace therapy. This goes further to prove that emotional connection regulates behaviour. Once the calming cycle theory is exercised and emotional connection is "established with the mother, emotional connection and co-regulation with other family members, as well as other people in the child's life such as teachers, follow naturally" (Welch, 2016).

In another article, “the calming cycle theory and the co-regulation of oxytocin, Welch and Ludwig (2017) prove that emotional connection and calmness improve behaviour. The calming cycle theory emanated from Pavlov’s co-conditioning theory which emphasizes that “subcortical Pavlovian co-conditioning of the autonomic nervous systems of mother and infant is the key to maintaining emotional connection between the two and to shaping emotional behaviour of the infant into adulthood.” It is therefore very important to regulate the emotional relationship between the tutelary guardian and the child in order to affect behaviour. This theory was chosen because it explains the power of calmness in shaping a person’s behaviour. In other words, it explains the connection between discipline and calmness and the damage violence does to discipline.

Summarily, presenting Welch and Ludwig (2016) as a theoretical framework for exploring the paradox of structure and calmness as disciplinary tools involves applying their concepts to the research context. Welch and Ludwig’s work can be used to examine the complex relationships between discipline, violence, and power dynamics. Their framework can help analyze how structural factors, such as institutional policies and social norms, influence disciplinary practices and perpetuate violence <sup>1</sup>.

To apply Welch and Ludwig’s framework, consider the following key components:

- 1) Structural factors: Examine how institutional policies, social norms, and power dynamics contribute to disciplinary practices and violence.
- 2) Disciplinary practices: Analyze how discipline is enacted and maintained in the research context, including the use of punishment, reward systems, and calmness.
- 3) Power dynamics: Investigate how power relationships between individuals and groups influence disciplinary practices and violence.

By using Welch and Ludwig’s framework, the research can provide insights into the paradoxical relationship between structure and calmness as disciplinary tools, shedding light on the ways in which discipline and violence intersect.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of discipline in maintaining order and promoting learning, many educational institutions and organizations continue to struggle with the paradoxical relationship between discipline and violence. On one hand, traditional disciplinary approaches often rely on punitive measures, such as suspension, expulsion, and corporal punishment, which can perpetuate violence and harm. On the other hand, alternative approaches that emphasize calmness, empathy, and understanding are often seen as ineffective or weak.

This paradox is particularly pronounced in contexts where structural factors, such as institutional policies, social norms, and power dynamics, can perpetuate violence and undermine efforts to promote positive discipline. As a result, many educators, policymakers, and practitioners are left wondering how to balance the need for discipline with the need to promote safety, well-being, and social responsibility.

The problem, therefore, is to explore the paradoxical relationship between structure and calmness as disciplinary tools, and to examine the ways in which disciplinary practices can be transformed to promote positive outcomes, reduce violence, and foster safe and supportive learning environments.

### Objectives

This paper seeks to ascertain if and how structure with calmness can be an effective tool for discipline.

### Research Questions

1. Is structure with calmness an effective tool for discipline?
2. How can structure with calmness be used as an effective tool for discipline?

### METHODOLOGY

This paper used a qualitative research design. Data were collected using questionnaires and were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics because the research instruments were observation and questionnaires. The researcher, being a parent and a teacher, observed disciplinary measures in her classroom, in the classroom of other colleagues, in her home and in the home of other parents. Questionnaire were distributed online to 61 parents, 21 teachers and 25 students from secondary to university levels. This wide scope was to better inform the research so that conclusive findings could be reached. It was imperative to gather data not only from those who are reckoned to be administrators of discipline but also from those who are recipients of discipline. The sampling technique used was opportunity sampling. By this method, parents, students and teachers who are acquaintances of the researcher, were randomly chosen. Data were analyzed using statistics calculated by google forms.

### PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

#### Research Question 1

Is structure with calmness an effective tool for discipline?

We have seen in the literature that structure is a routine of what to do and how to do it. We also saw that calmness is being able to control one’s emotions. We equally saw that discipline is teaching. We cannot give

consequences for a bad behaviour when we have not taught, consistently, what is supposed to be done and put in place a routine that will facilitate the implementation of the said behaviour. To answer research question 1, we will analyze the responses to questions 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 of the questionnaires.

When asked if the participants believed in beating children as a disciplinary measure, 58.8% of them said they do while 41.2% said they did not. One can deduce from these figures that most tutelary guardians use violence on children. For those who believed that beating is a disciplinary tool, gave their reasons as well as those who believed otherwise. We had reasons like, "that is how I was raised and I believe I have grown to be responsible and accountable". This shows that some tutelary guardians just repeat what they have seen and experienced but have not taken time to study if there was a better way to discipline. Another participant explained that, "beating children only creates fear in them which makes them follow instructions for a while. This is due to the fact that they are doing it for the fear of being beaten". This response shows that beating is used as a weapon of control. In other words, the children are not taught to be well behaved out of conviction but are conditioned to fear the consequence of being beaten. This takes away the purpose of discipline which is to teach. So some tutelary guardians are training eye servants instead of people who can defend what they believe in, even in the absence of their guardians. Another participant explained that, "slight beating might be helpful at earlier stages but then the adults in charge hardly know where to draw the line between light and heavy so I wouldn't encourage beating". What one can retain from this response is that, beating, yelling, and shaming are forms of violence and they emanate from lack of emotional control. The tutelary guardian has to be calm and teach the desired behaviour through consistent routines.

Question 5 inquired if there was an alternative method of discipline other than beating. Out of the 102 participants, 98% of them agreed that there were other methods of discipline. So we see that although most of the participants (58.8%) believed in beating children, they knew that there were other ways that discipline could be handled. That is why we say that beating is an easy way out. The other alternatives that the participants mentioned included: conversations, giving time outs, withdrawal of privileges, house chores as a consequence, dialogue and counselling. Therefore, one can safely conclude that instead of using violence which emanates from lack of emotional control and which is also detrimental to the victim, the tutelary guardian should be calm and consistently use the above proposed alternative disciplinary methods, in the form of a routine (structure).

## Research Question 2

How can structure with calmness be used as an effective tool for discipline?

To respond to this research question, firstly we need to establish how effective structure with calmness is, as a tool for discipline. The participants were asked if they worked better and faster when taught calmly. Out of the 102 participants, 94.1% agreed that they worked better and faster when taught calmly and 5.9% said they did not. It is significantly clear here that, when the tutelary guardian is calm, teaching (discipline) is more effective than in a violent circumstance. The participants were further asked if they worked better and faster when they are shown (modelled) what to do. Out of the 102 participants, 98% agreed that they worked better and faster when shown what to do. Only 2% disagreed. This again proves that structure is important for discipline to be effective. The tutelary guardians should teach what to do and how to do it. The participants were also asked if they worked better and faster when they are insulted. Out of the 102 participants, 96.1% said they did not. This shows that psychological violence in the form of insults, has a negative impact on learning. Insults distort our ability to think and act rationally. Why then do some tutelary guardians inflict psychological harm on children? The answer is lack of emotional control. This goes further to strengthen the point that discipline should be done in a calm environment. It is only when there is lack of emotional control that violence is perpetrated.

The participants were asked if they worked better and faster when they are yelled at. Out of the 102 participants, 82.4% said they did not and 17.6% said they worked better and faster when they are yelled at. This again buttresses the point that, violence through yelling, is counterproductive. Yelling does not yield the desired result of discipline. Question 12 demanded if the participants worked better and faster when they are beaten. Out of the 102 participants, 75.5% said they did not while 24.5% said they did. The difference here is significant. This portrays that the 24.5% have been programmed to work only when beaten while 75.5% cannot do any effective work when beaten. Therefore, beating does not produce any effective, long-lasting outcome.

The participants were asked after how many attempts they got work done perfectly. The options given were: first, second and several. Out of the 102 participants, 23.5% said they get work done perfectly the first time. 39.2% said they get work done perfectly the second time. And 37.3% said they get work done perfectly after several attempts. The *raison d'être* for this question was to find out if it were possible to get work done perfectly the first time, the second time or after several attempts. That is to say, if many more people got work done perfectly after several attempts, then there is need for emotional control, patience and a consistent schedule or routine, to get the desired results. In other words, beating, yelling and shaming, will not get work done perfectly as fast as possible. Therefore, tutelary guardians should teach with patience and follow a structure that works.

To determine how effective structure is to discipline, the participants were asked if modelling good behaviour to children was effective. The options given were: very effective, not very effective, and not effective. 82.4% of the 102 participants said modelling good behaviour was very effective. 16.7% said modelling good behaviour was not very effective. And an insignificant number of participants said modelling good behaviour was not effective. The responses from this question crown the answer to research question 2. Research question 2 inquires how structure with calmness can be an effective tool for discipline. The answer is, structure with calmness can be effective through modelling good behaviour. Children learn better from what they see than from fear. So, if the tutelary guardian expects good behaviour, he/she should teach it by example, consistently.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a) Shift from punitive to restorative approaches: Move away from punitive measures and towards restorative practices that focus on repairing harm, building relationships, and promoting social responsibility.
- b) Use calmness and empathy as disciplinary tools: Recognize the value of calmness and empathy in de-escalating conflicts and promoting positive behavior.
- c) Foster positive relationships: Prioritize building positive relationships with students, colleagues, and parents to create a safe and supportive learning environment.
- d) Develop and implement restorative discipline policies: Create policies that promote restorative practices and provide resources and support for educators to implement these approaches.
- e) Provide training and professional development: Offer ongoing training and professional development opportunities for educators to learn about restorative practices, calmness, and empathy.
- f) Monitor and evaluate disciplinary practices: Regularly monitor and evaluate disciplinary practices to ensure they are fair, effective, and promote positive outcomes.
- g) Continue to explore the paradox of structure and calmness: Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of the complex relationships between discipline, violence, and calmness.
- h) Investigate the impact of restorative practices on student outcomes: Research is needed to examine the impact of restorative practices on student academic achievement, social-emotional learning, and well-being.
- i) Develop and test new disciplinary models: Scholars should continue to develop and test new disciplinary models that prioritize calmness, empathy, and restorative practices.

### CONCLUSION

This paper set out to draw a dichotomy between discipline and violence. The paper also discussed how structure with calmness can enforce discipline. Discipline was defined as teaching. In other words, desired principles have to be taught, not expected to just happen. Violence was described as an act of inflicting physical, emotional and psychological pain on another, whether for an intended good or evil. The literature plus the data collected showed that many tutelary guardians use violence (beating, yelling and shaming) to enforce desired principles. This violence used, causes fear on their victims and makes the victims to either obey out of compulsion (which is short-lived) instead of conviction (which is permanent) or causes them to rebel. Whether the children obey or rebel, the violence is played in their minds and they eventually become violent in one way or another.

Thus, making violence, cyclical. The fear caused by violence may lead to an amygdala hijack. Amygdala hijack results in illogical and irrational overreactive behaviours in the children. The data collected attests that violence is used as an easy way out but the tutelary guardians recognize that, there are better ways to discipline. It was established that violence is perpetrated as a result of the lack of emotional control. If the mind is disciplined to be emotionally intelligent, there would be no need for violence. Data collected proves that learning in a calm environment, void of yelling and beating, produces better and lasting results. Since perfection comes from persistence, teachers and parents should be patient in expecting desirable outcomes. Structure was defined as teaching what to do and how to do it in the form of a routine. Results from the data revealed that teaching via modelling is very effective.

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