Encouraging empathy, sharing science, or raising awareness of rights?

The impact of messaging on teachers' attitudes toward corporal punishment in a Tanzanian refugee camp

July 2017

Executive Summary

Physical punishment – from hitting children with sticks to making them kneel to slapping them – occurs every day in classrooms throughout the world. Yet we know experiences of violence at school are associated with lower attendance and academic achievement as well as higher drop-out rates.[1] Among girls, school violence can also have effects across generations, leading to a weakened household economy, worse health, and higher fertility rates.[2]

Despite the detrimental impacts and staggering rates of corporal punishment in schools, there remains a dearth of evidence on what works to shift harmful attitudes and behaviors that uphold these practices, particularly in crisis-affected contexts. Even when interventions are proven effective, we often don't know which component of the program contributed to the improvements. Meaning, there is virtually no evidence on effective ingredients and light-touch approaches to reduce physical punishment in schools in humanitarian settings.

The Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) therefore partnered to explore whether an innovative approach – applying insights from the behavioral sciences, or the study of how people make decisions and why – could shed some light on this issue. Our work takes place in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania – the third largest refugee camp in the world and home to nearly 140,000 refugees from neighboring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[3] Through conducting interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, we learned that for many teachers living in Nyarugusu, physical discipline is a normal – almost automatic – reaction to students' perceived misbehavior. For these teachers, this is simply the way it's always been, the way to teach children right from wrong, and the way to help guide students to a better future.

What we did

Our project has two primary goals. First, to understand how best to persuade teachers of the need to change their disciplinary behavior. And second, after learning what works best to convince them of the need to change, establishing how best to help them follow through on their intention to change their behavior. This note summarizes findings from an intervention designed to achieve the first goal.

We designed educational modules for teachers and invited all IRC and Save the Children teachers living in Nyarugusu to participate, including both Congolese and Burundian refugee teachers. We tested three modules through a randomized controlled trial, which allowed us to compare one strategy often used in the violence-reduction field (a rights-based approach) and two innovative approaches drawing on the latest behavioral insights:

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[1] Save the Children Denmark, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women's Affairs, A Study on Violence against Girls in Primary Schools and Its Impacts on Girls' Education in Ethiopia, Save the Children, Addis Ababa, 2008.

[2] Pereznieto, P., et al., The Economic Impact of School Violence: A report for Plan International, Plan International and Overseas Development Institute, London, 2010

[3] Increasing perils at Tanzania's Nyarugusu refugee camp. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/05/increasing-perils-tanzania-nyarugusu-refugee-camp-160520115153710.html

1. Raising awareness of children's rights and the rules that protect them
2. Building empathy for children experiencing violence; and
3. Sharing clinical evidence on the impact of violence against children.

Currently, the humanitarian community often uses a rules and rights-based approach to discuss corporal punishment with teachers and children alike; the first module, therefore, is akin to business-as-usual and serves to show us how teachers currently feel about violence (in other words, it is our control group). We then drew on behavioral science to craft two modules that featured empathy-building and clinical evidence sharing approaches. To promote teachers openness to changing their views, we also asked them to reflect on their values and identity before listening to these two behaviorally-informed modules. Previous studies show that such values-affirmation exercises can boost people's self-efficacy – i.e. their confidence in their ability to accomplish tasks – and make them more willing to accept new information or change their views.

To compare the effectiveness of the three modules, we offered teachers the option of signing up for a follow-up program (including receiving information via SMS and in-person sessions) to learn more about how to make their classrooms safe. We also asked them a few questions to gauge their attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment in schools. At the end, these metrics helped us understand which modules most effectively persuade teachers to enroll in a program to change their behavior and reduce favorable views about corporal punishment.

What we found

We found that the modules can be effective for different purposes and for different populations. On average, none of the modules was comparably more effective at driving enrollment in the follow-up program. When we analyze this by different groups, the module focused on the rights of children and school rules seems to be slightly more effective at driving enrollment among Burundians, women, and secondary-school teachers. We hypothesize that this may be because a more institutional or familiar message – focused on rights, laws, and expected conduct – may prompt more people to signal they are in compliance with such rules.

While the rules and rights-based approach can successfully encourage certain populations to enroll in a program or demonstrate compliance with the rules, it does not make teachers less accepting of corporal punishment. Where attitudes are concerned, both behaviorally-informed modules effectively reduce favorable views towards corporal punishment compared to the rules/rights based module. Overall, building empathy was the most effective way to change teachers' attitudes – particularly among Burundians, men, and primary-school teachers. Lastly, reflecting on values and identity significantly increased teachers' sense of self-efficacy, which may yield a number of positive outcomes for children.

What's next

The IRC and BIT aim to use the learning from this study to design a tailored program to reduce the use of corporal punishment in Nyarugusu. This next phase of work would include testing an intervention to i) help teachers reframe and adjust their automatic behavior (using a toolkit based on cognitive behavioral therapy techniques), ii) provide ongoing support to teachers through their peer networks and SMS communications, and ii) simplify school regulations.

We will also explore whether these finding can be scaled up, by integrating them into holistic, comprehensive teacher trainings more broadly, or applied to programs aimed at changing parental use of corporal punishment in Nyarugusu and elsewhere.

Introduction

Why We Chose this Area of Study and Where We Worked

Violence against children is a common problem around the world. Six out of ten children between the ages of two and 14 – nearly a billion children worldwide – are subjected to regular physical punishment by their caregivers.[i] Corporal punishment is associated with a host of negative outcomes for children, such as lowering their self-esteem, interfering with the learning process, and teaching that violence is an acceptable way of solving problems.[ii] Violence against children is also associated with greater likelihood of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in later years.[iii]

Despite its pervasiveness and the known harm it imposes on children, many adults still believe it is the best and only way to discipline a child. These beliefs are strongly held and there is a dearth of evidence on how to change them and, ultimately, how to reduce this negative behavior. Indeed, there has only been one randomized controlled trial to measure the effectiveness of a program intended to stop the use of corporal punishment in schools in Sub-Saharan Africa.[iv] While this program – the Good Schools Toolkit, created by the organization Raising Voices – reduced the risk of physical violence by teachers and school staff against children by 42%, we don't know what program elements contributed to this reduction.[v] Furthermore, the Good Schools Toolkit features a comprehensive curriculum that takes 18 months to be implemented, multiple types of content, and large time commitments by teachers and staff. There is currently no evidence on light-touch approaches that can be easily incorporated into existing teacher training programs.

To fill in this knowledge gap, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) partnered to use behavioral science – insights into the predictable, yet sometimes surprising, ways that humans behave in response to their environment – to design a program to reduce corporal punishment by teachers in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp. The goal was to test light-touch approaches – such as messaging or exercises – to determine what elements most effectively discourage the use of corporal punishment.

Nyarugusu, located in Tanzania, is the third largest refugee camp in the world, and hosts nearly 140,000 refugees from neighboring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[vi] Although these groups present many similarities, their situations are markedly different. Most Congolese have been settled at the camp for many years, whereas the largest influx of Burundian refugees occurred in the past two years. For most Burundians, this is not the first time in their lives that they have had to seek refuge in Tanzania.

During our intensive field research in Tanzania in 2016 we learned that, despite widespread awareness of rules against corporal punishment, teachers and school personnel continue to use it. Because corporal punishment is used and accepted, one-off behavioral nudges may not be sufficient to produce long-lasting

change in teacher behavior. If teachers don't want to change, they will likely revert to the way it has always been. Instead, offering teachers a reason to justify any changes in their use of disciplinary methods could generate an intention to change — shifting their views on whether hitting children is acceptable or encouraging them to get support to change their behavior. Research in Canada shows that favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment predict its use, at least among parents.[vii][viii] Therefore, decreasing favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment may motivate teachers to change their behavior or to seek resources that will help them accomplish this aim, thus reducing the prevalence of violence. In this light, we launched a two-phased program aimed at:

- Learning what works to generate the intention to change among teachers, and
- Converting that willingness into actual behavioral change.

This note shares the results of an intervention, which sought to understand what approaches most effectively build an intention to change disciplinary behavior from corporal punishment to positive discipline among teachers in Nyarugusu.

What We Did

We designed two behaviorally-informed informational modules and compared them to the business-as-usual approach

The IRC and BIT designed two informational modules (lasting approximately 60 minutes), drawing on behavioral insights, with the goal of developing an intention to change disciplinary behavior among teachers and shifting attitudes towards corporal punishment. The two modules describe corporal punishment as harsh, harmful to children's ability to learn, and an ineffective way to prepare children for a safe and prosperous future. Yet these two modules rely on markedly different approaches to convey this information: either by building empathy for children or by sharing clinical evidence of the negative impact of violence on their brain development.

The empathy-building module attempts to catalyze empathy in teachers for students — specifically around the negative effects of corporal punishment on a child's emotions and experience of school. Evidence on the use of empathy-building and perspective-taking as a technique to change behavior in low and middle-income countries is limited. The Good Schools Toolkit used stories, taking the perspective of children, to encourage empathy and persuade teachers to stop using violence in schools.[ix] Promising research also suggests that, when people are asked to take the perspective of others, they see more of themselves in the other group and are therefore less likely to activate stereotypic thinking or in-group biases.[x] This can, in turn, lead to kinder behavior towards others. Based on this research, our module combined adapted versions of stories in the Good Schools Toolkit with personal reflections to help teachers identify similarities between their experiences and that of children, strengthening an empathetic bond. Specifically, facilitators first asked teachers to think of a time when they had been treated unfairly as children before having them read stories describing how children felt when they were physically punished in school.

The clinical evidence module presents teachers with information, evidence, and images showing that corporal punishment is harmful to children's ability to learn.[xi] While conducting formative research for this project, Dr. Erin Fletcher found early evidence that messages which included clinical information on the

impact of corporal punishment may influence teachers' views on its acceptability.[xii] This module also built on qualitative research, led by the IRC's Airbel Center in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, where showing brain scans was found to be a powerful motivator for changing parental behaviors. Following this experience, the IRC and BIT ran a randomized controlled to test if different messages (sent via SMS) could encourage over 12,000 refugee parents to engage with digital content on how to improve their children's development. In this trial, sharing scientific research about child development was a more powerful driver of content engagement than emphasizing the recipient's influence as a parent or caregiver. Given this emerging evidence, we hypothesized presenting clinical information could positively shift teachers' attitudes towards corporal punishment.

As part of these behaviorally-informed modules, we also asked teachers to reflect on their values and identity. Research shows people can be more open to change their ways after considering their values, so we hypothesized that starting sessions with a values affirmation exercise could make teachers more receptive to new information.[xiii] [xiv] This exercise also allowed teachers to contrast their self-perception – as a caring teacher, perhaps – with the knowledge that their behavior may be having a negative impact on students, creating cognitive dissonance and moving them to change.

We then designed a randomized controlled trial to test the effectiveness of these two behaviorally-informed modules, relative to the standard practice of discussing the rights of children and existing rules banning corporal punishment. The graphic below summarizes the three groups we compared.
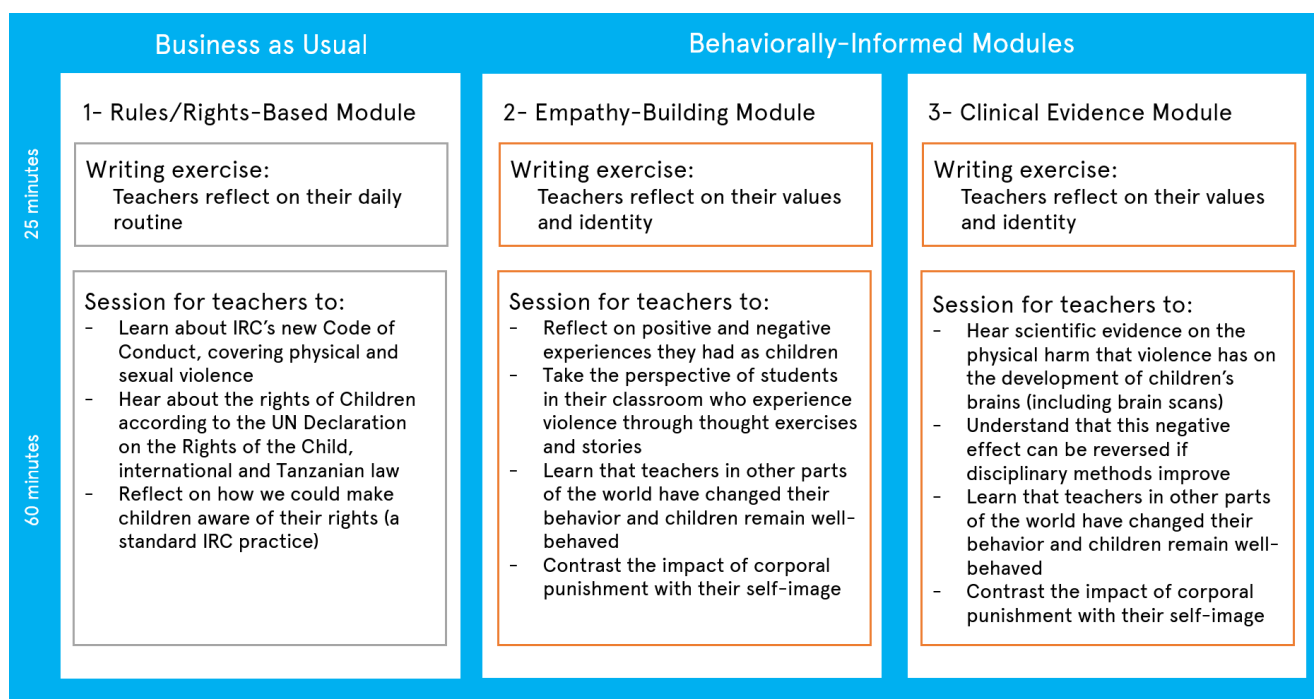

Figure 1: Summary of Teacher Module

Study Design

We invited all teachers in Nyarugusu to attend one of the three modules, selected at random. With 75% of teachers in Nyarugusu attending, we had 1,042 study participants. See Appendix 1 for more detailed demographic information on study participants.

Ultimately, the goal of this initiative is to reduce the use of corporal punishment by teachers. At this stage, we were interested in understanding which intervention teachers engaged with and which could change their views on corporal punishment, before embarking on an intervention to change behavior. In that light, we used two proxy metrics to measure the effectiveness of all three modules:

1. *Sign-up rates:* This measure reflects whether teachers enroll in a follow-up program to learn more about how to make their classrooms safe. In order to sign up, teachers had to drop off a form at the IRC Education Coordinator's office within three days of attending the session. We designed this measure to give us an indication of whether teachers were willing to make a tangible effort to signal their willingness to change their disciplinary practices.
2. *Attitudes towards Corporal Punishment:* After the modules, teachers filled out a brief survey including two instruments that captured teachers' attitudes toward corporal punishment in schools. The first instrument asked teachers if they agreed or disagreed with four value-statements about corporal punishment. The second instrument asked teachers if they thought it would be acceptable to hit a child in nine different classroom-based scenarios. See Appendix 2 for the surveys used. Attitudes towards corporal punishment is an important metric because, in prior studies, favorable attitudes predict its use, at least among parents.[xv] [xvi] Therefore, decreasing favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment may help reduce its prevalence.

What We Found

Encouraging enrollment in a follow-up program

Looking at enrollment data offers valuable learning for future program design. Overall, teachers turned in the sign-up form at a high rate (60% on average). This may reflect a high interest in learning more about disciplinary methods, a general lack of opportunities to participate in novel activities in the camp, or a high propensity to comply with requests, if they are perceived as formal.

The following graph shows the proportion of teachers who enrolled in a follow up program.[4] As we can see, none of the strategies were, on average, more effective at encouraging teachers to sign up.

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[4] In all of the graphs in this report, stars above a bar indicate statistical significance. If a bar is significant, we can be reasonably sure it is different from the control group. The more stars, the greater degree of confidence. The small orange lines at the top of each bar are "error bars." These show the amount of uncertainty in the data, as a confidence interval.
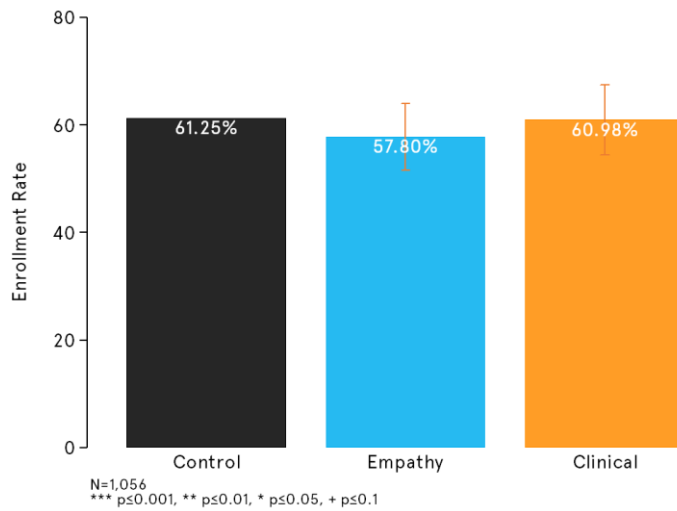
Figure 2: Overall effect of different modules on enrollment

However, when we look closer at the effect of the modules on different groups, we find that the rights-based module (control) is more effective at driving sign-ups among women,[5] secondary school teachers,[6] and Burundians.[7] The following graphs show the effect on different demographics.

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[5] The empathy and clinical trial arms become statistically significantly different from the rights-based arm for women when we take into account other factors (i.e. age and the session attended).

[6] Non-secondary school teachers refer mostly to primary school teachers, including also pre-school and special-education teachers.

[7] When taking into account other factors, the rights/rules-based approach is significantly more effective than empathy for Burundians and equally as effective as clinical for the Congolese.
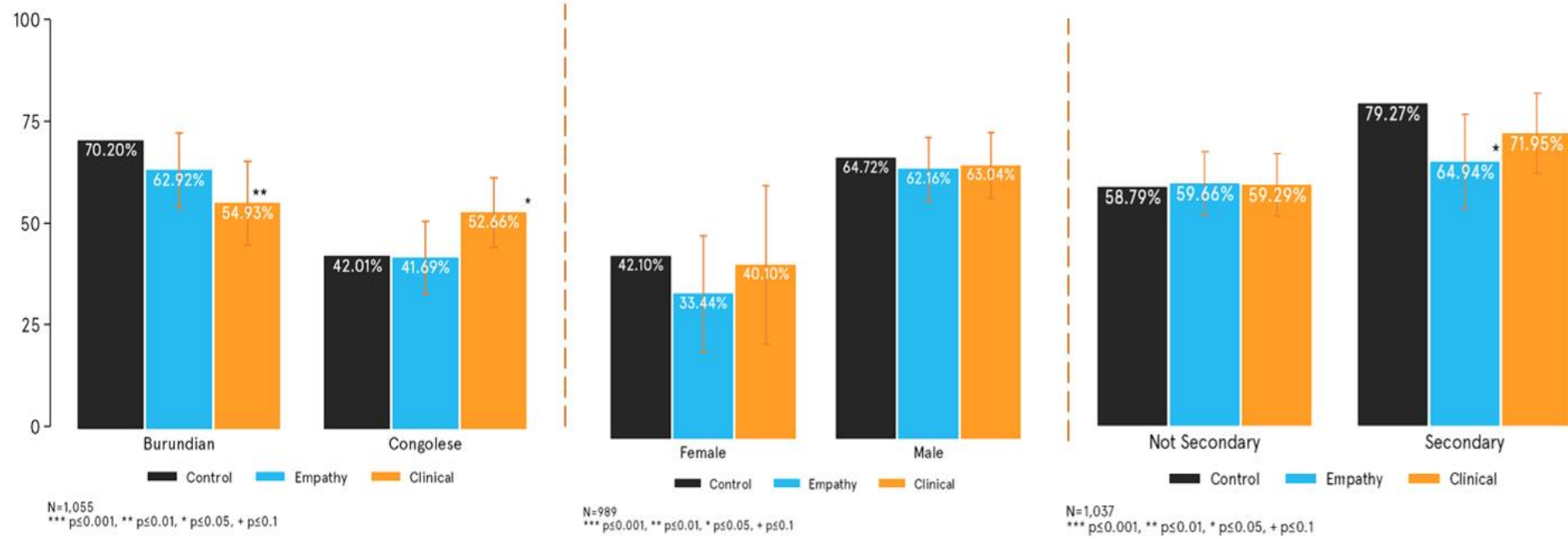
Figure 3: Effect of modules on enrollment rates for different demographic groups

Understanding these findings

1. Why is the rights-based module more effective at driving sign-ups than either the clinical or empathy module for Burundian, secondary-school, and female teachers?

There may be a few reasons for this effect:

First, a relatively more institutional message describing the law and expected conduct may be more effective at encouraging people to take visible steps to signal compliance than the other messages, particularly among the most vulnerable populations (in this case, Burundians, who are still less settled in the camp, and women). The rights/rules-based module described examples of penalties, including prison time, for use of violence against children. These negative incentives could prompt people to signal that they comply with the law or the code of conduct.

Second, we theorize that institutional pressure may have a stronger impact on Burundians because they are newer residents of the camp. The Congolese population has been living in Nyarugusu for over 20 years and are fairly well-established. They know what to expect from the IRC and other organizations, including camp authorities. The Burundians, on the other hand, have only been living in the camp for two years. Their systems are much less developed and they are materially worse off. They may think that increased compliance, even in a situation that appears voluntary, could impact how they are perceived by the IRC. While the IRC may have been associated with all of the trainings, we hypothesize that institutional pressure was higher in the rules/rights-approach as the IRC code of conduct was discussed.

Finally, learning the effects of corporal punishment may be difficult, creating cognitive dissonance – mental discomfort experienced by a person who simultaneously holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values – among the teachers in the clinical and empathy modules. If this is true, people in these modules may be less likely to sign up to hear more of the same because it can be uncomfortable. Moreover, since the rules/rights-approach is the status quo, teachers may have felt more familiar with this content and thus more comfortable signing up to receive additional information about it.

2. Why were some populations less likely to enroll?

The graphs also illustrate how the Congolese, women, and non-secondary school teachers were generally less likely to enroll in a follow-up program. There may be a few reasons for this, notably:

● **Burundians** arrived in the camp more recently so they may not be as saturated with programming as the Congolese, and therefore more willing to sign up.
● **Men** are not responsible for domestic household duties, so they may have more time for extracurricular activities than women. Alternatively, this may be driven by the fact women have more favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment (see below) than men.
● **Secondary-school teachers** may be more sensitive to information about sexual violence. The code of conduct includes a section on reducing sexual violence, which is considered unequivocally bad and affects secondary-age children more saliently. For this reason,

secondary-school teachers may be more interested in learning how to make the classrooms safe or in signaling that they are in compliance with the code of conduct.

Decreasing favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment

To measure attitudes, we asked teachers to show their level of agreement or disagreement (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) with four values-statements supporting the use of corporal punishment ('Attitudes towards Hitting' scale) or with the use of corporal punishment in nine scenarios of misbehavior ('Scenario Attitudes towards Hitting' Scale).

High-level findings

Overall, we found that both behaviorally-informed modules – building empathy and sharing clinical evidence – decrease favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment compared to a rights-based approach. Yet the empathy-building outperformed the clinical evidence module for most groups.

Importantly, we found that the **behaviorally-informed modules were effective at flipping people's views from agreeing with corporal punishment to disagreeing**. In other words, the improvements in attitudes shown above do not only reflect moving people from disagreeing to strongly disagreeing with corporal punishment.

In figures 4 and 5, we only take into account whether teachers agreed or disagreed with the use of corporal punishment (disregarding the intensity of such agreement), so this reflects whether we were able to move teachers across the agree/disagree line.[8] Figure 4 shows the proportion of questions in which teachers agree that hitting children is either necessary or acceptable, on the values-based survey. In a way, this scale reflects the level of agreement with the use of corporal punishment in schools, such that 100% represents complete agreement with using corporal punishment and 0% complete disagreement.
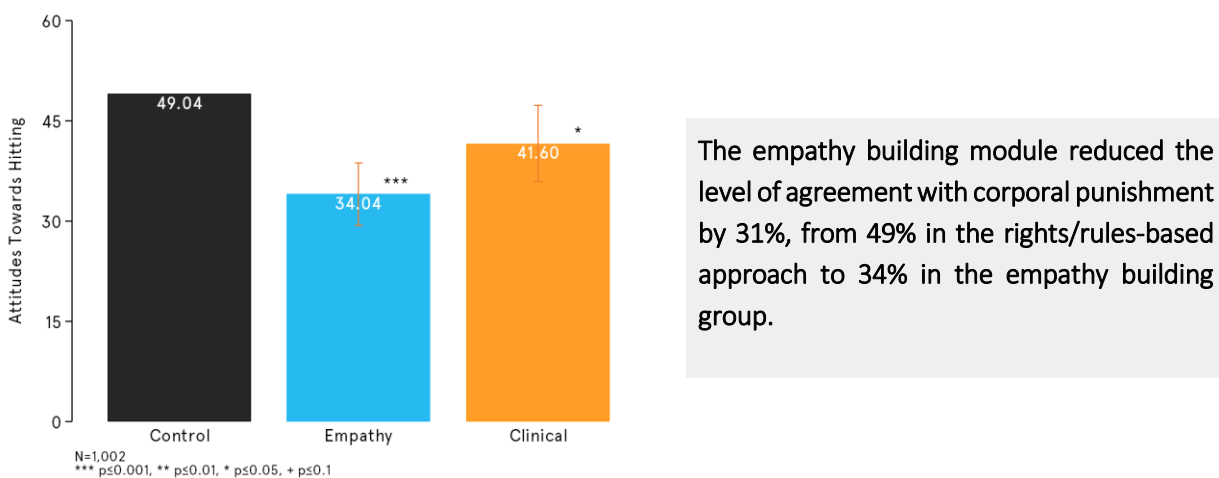

The empathy building module reduced the level of agreement with corporal punishment by 31%, from 49% in the rights/rules-based approach to 34% in the empathy building group.

Figure 4: Proportion of questions in which teachers have a favorable attitude towards corporal punishment in the values-based survey

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[8] To run this analysis, we combined teachers' responses to the two surveys into two possible answers: agreement means that a teacher either agreed or strongly agreed with the use of corporal punishment, while disagreement means that a teacher either disagreed and strongly disagreed.

In Appendix 3, we show the impact of the modules along the four questions included in the values-based survey.

Figure 5 below conveys the proportion of scenarios in which teachers agree it is acceptable to hit a student, on average. A score of 100% means that teachers think students should be hit in all scenarios, while 0% means they think children should never be hit.
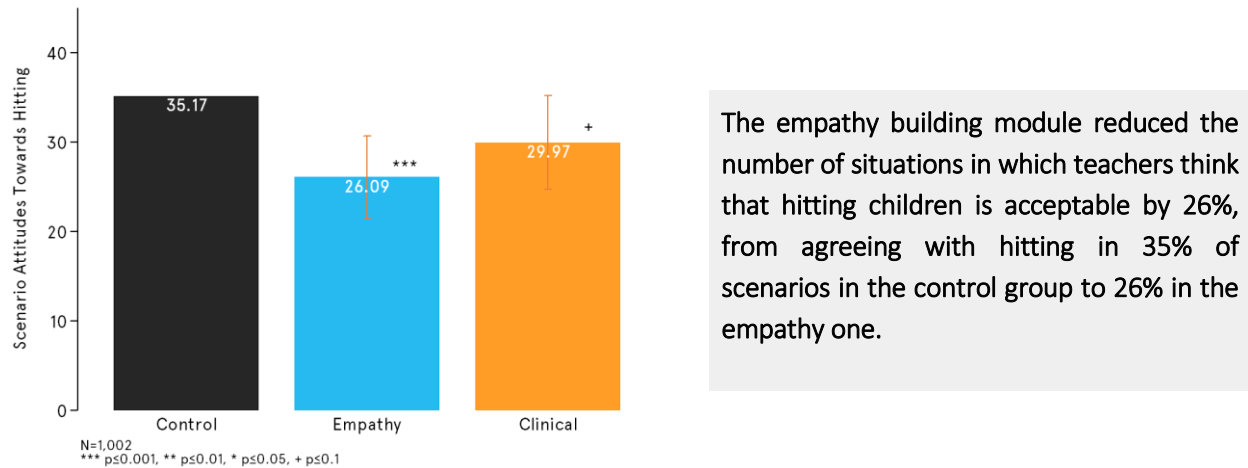

The empathy building module reduced the number of situations in which teachers think that hitting children is acceptable by 26%, from agreeing with hitting in 35% of scenarios in the control group to 26% in the empathy one.

Figure 5: Proportion of scenarios in which teachers agree it is acceptable to hit children

As these graphs show, the empathy building module was the most effective at shifting teachers' views – from support to opposition to corporal punishment – both in terms of their values and of disciplining concrete scenarios of misbehavior.

Detailed findings along both attitudes scales

In this section, we analyze results using the full scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) to show changes in the level of agreement with corporal punishment.

Figure 6 shows how, on average, both the empathy building and clinical evidence modules reduced teachers' favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment. In the first graph, a scale of 4 to 16 points shows people's agreement with values-based statements supporting corporal punishment, such that a higher score reflects more acceptance of using physical punishment in schools.

In the second graph, we use a scale of 9 to 36 points reflecting teachers' agreement that children should be hit in different scenarios of misbehavior in the classroom. Again, a higher score reflects greater agreement with the use of physical discipline in schools, such that a 36 reflects strong agreement that it is acceptable to hit students in every scenario. In other words, for both surveys, a lower score is better.
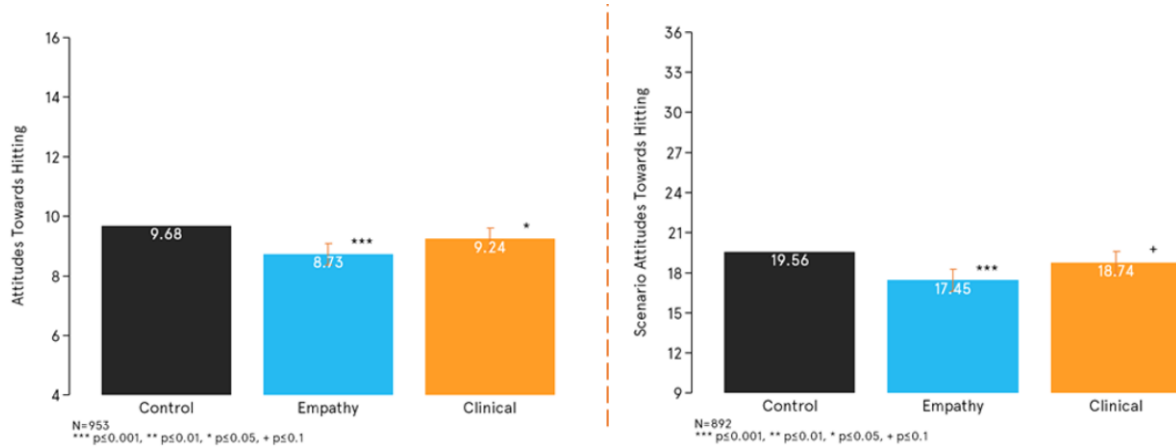
Figure 6: Overall effect of different modules on favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment

Based on these graphs, we find evidence that the empathy building module lowers the degree to which teachers agree that it is acceptable to hit students by averages of 9.8% and 10.8% relative to the rules / rights-based approach, for each scale. This improvement is stronger than the one prompted by the clinical evidence module.

Whose Attitudes Shifted?

Analyzing the impact of the modules for different demographic groups reveals that both behaviorally-informed modules shifted the Burundian teachers' attitudes on the values-based survey, but only the empathy module shifted their attitudes on the scenario-based survey.

For Congolese teachers, only the empathy building module produced a significant improvement in attitudes relative to the rights / rules-based module for both surveys. In general, Burundian teachers are more affected by both treatment modules, potentially because Burundian teachers have had less exposure to similar interventions.
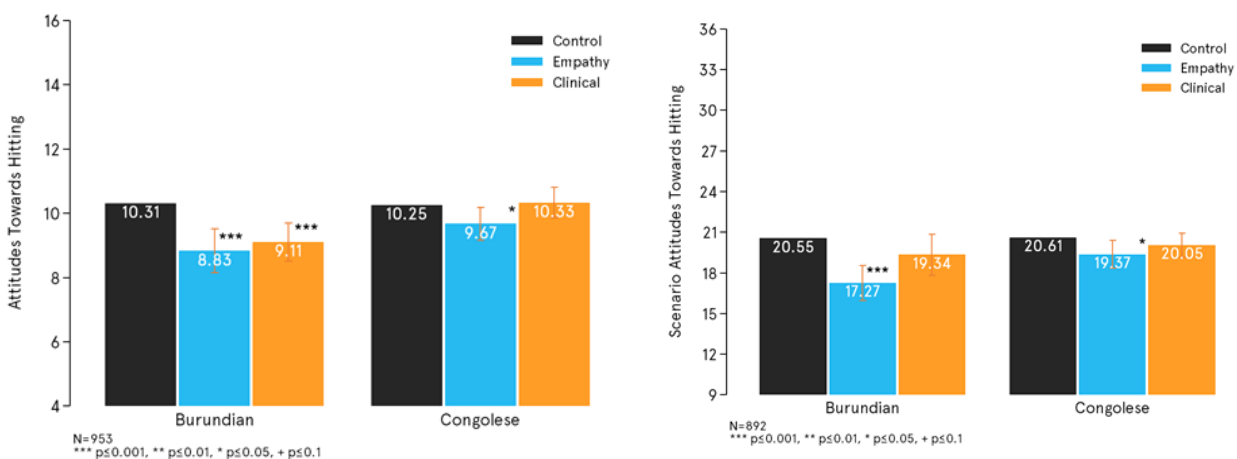

Figure 7: Effect of modules on two different scales of attitudes towards corporal punishment showing the difference for the Congolese and Burundian populations

The empathy building module also performed better across both genders, though a few interesting conclusions emerge when we look at the different impact that the modules had on male and female teachers. While the clinical module proved ineffective for men, there is some evidence that it improved women's attitudes towards corporal punishment. This is mostly driven by two questions on the scale: learning about the negative impact of corporal punishment on brain development convinced a large proportion of women that there should be a law against teachers using corporal punishment and that it is not necessary for teachers to hit students in order for them to learn. Interestingly, female teachers appear to have slightly more favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment than their male counterparts.
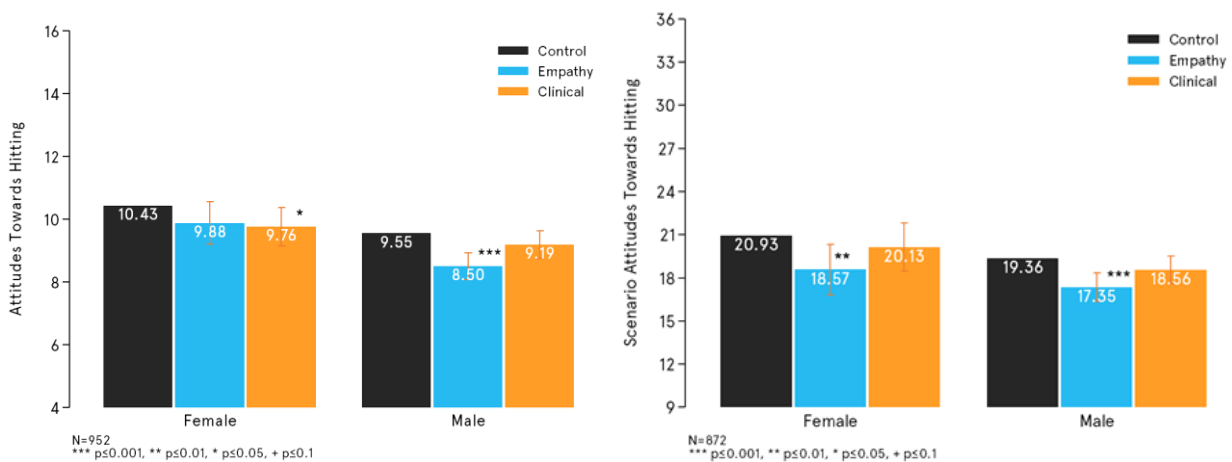

Figure 8: Effect of modules on two different scales of attitudes towards corporal punishment showing the difference between male and female teachers

Finally, both modules positively shifted primary school teachers' attitudes towards corporal punishment on both scales, though empathy again had the largest effect. This is good news, as it means our treatments could impact the way that the youngest students are disciplined, with positive long-term consequences.

The graph below also shows that the behaviorally-informed modules did not generate a significant decrease in positive attitudes towards corporal punishment among secondary-school teachers. This may be partly due to the fact that this group was not large enough to detect a statistically significant difference. Even so, favorable attitudes seem to be lower for the secondary-school teachers who attended either the empathy building or the clinical evidence module, so we expect these modules to have a positive impact on the group, even if smaller.
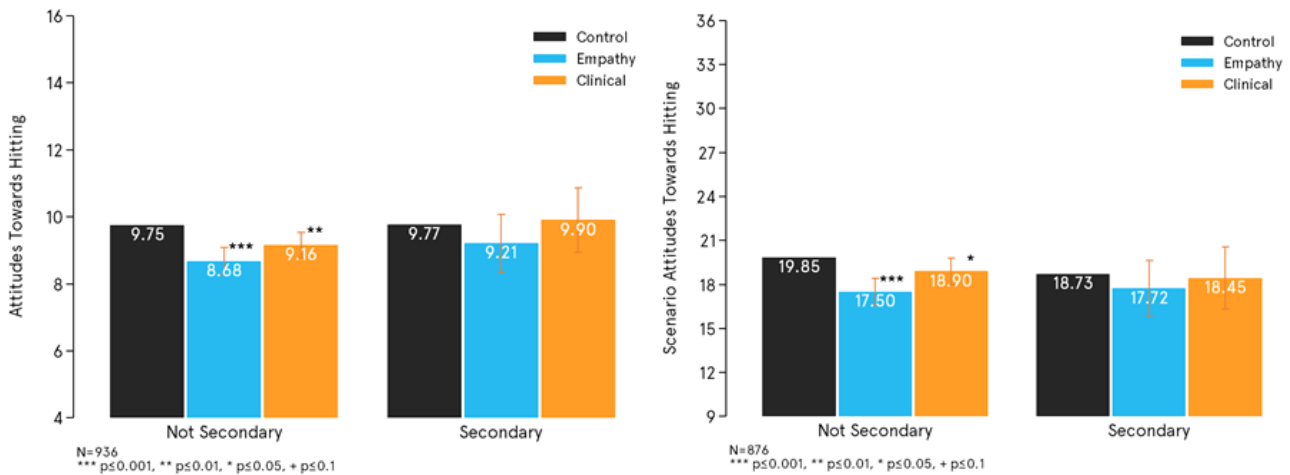
Figure 9: Effect of modules on two different scales of attitudes towards corporal punishment showing the difference secondary and non-secondary school teachers

Understanding these findings

1. Which module is more effective at shifting attitudes?

Almost every analysis confirms that building empathy works better for improving teachers' attitudes towards physical punishment than either raising awareness of children's rights and rules or sharing clinical evidence. This effect is strongest for Burundians, men, and non-secondary school teachers. Importantly, the empathy building module successfully moves people from agreeing with corporal punishment to disagreeing with its use, reducing both the intensity of beliefs and the number of scenarios in which teachers think it is acceptable to hit children.

While the shifts in attitudes may seem small when we consider raw scores, we do see considerable movement of teachers across the 'agree/ disagree line'. It is also worth noting that these changes result from an hour-long program. An increased amount of programming may lead to larger positive shifts in teacher attitudes.

2. Why is the empathy-building module more effective?

While the empathy-building module was not significantly better than the clinical evidence (from a statistical perspective), the reduction in favorable views towards corporal punishment it generated was greater among most groups. This suggests that encouraging empathy is generally more effective at improving attitudes.

Based on focus groups with teachers conducted ahead of our study, we hypothesize that scientific evidence may be viewed in opposition to religion, which holds a prominent role in teachers' lives. These scientific findings may have also been perceived as too Western, and therefore less relevant in Nyarugusu. Lastly, the clinical evidence module may have been too technical and difficult to understand.

3. Why is the empathy-building module more effective for men?

There are a few potential reasons why building empathy may work better for men. First, women may engage in empathetic thinking more regularly,[xvii] so this approach may be more novel and therefore effective for men.

Second, in environments like Nyarugusu, where gender-based violence remains highly prevalent,[xviii] women are more exposed to violence. This may in turn affect their attitudes towards acts of violence. Studies of women who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) or domestic violence show that they are in general more in favor of FGM, more likely to circumcise their daughters, and more likely to support views that husbands are justified in beating their wives.[xix] A similar effect may be contributing to women's relatively high support for corporal punishment, as well as the fact that building empathy seems less effective for women than men.

Lastly, female teachers have slightly more favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment than men. This may be due to the fact that, as the primary caretakers of children, women are more often use harsh discipline at home. If this exposure to physical discipline desensitizes women to it, they may be less able to empathize with children who are hit.

Boosting teachers' self-efficacy by focusing on values and identity

Research shows that focusing on values – or the beliefs that are important to people – can help them overcome low self-perceptions resulting from, among other reasons, negative stereotypes or a weak sense of belonging in a group. The theory suggests that, by reflecting on the aspects of people's lives where they excel or on things that are valuable to them, people can build their self-confidence and perform better.[xx]

To test this theoretical model, we measured teachers' sense of self-efficacy after they completed a values affirmation and identity exercise, and compared their scores against the control group, which instead completed a neutral writing exercise. Teacher self-efficacy – i.e., "teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning"[xxi] – positively correlates with greater levels of planning and organization; openness to new ideas; willingness to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students; persistence and resilience in the face of challenges; less criticism of students when they make errors, and, as a result, better student learning.[xxii] Therefore, increasing teachers' self-efficacy could result in positive outcomes for themselves and their students.
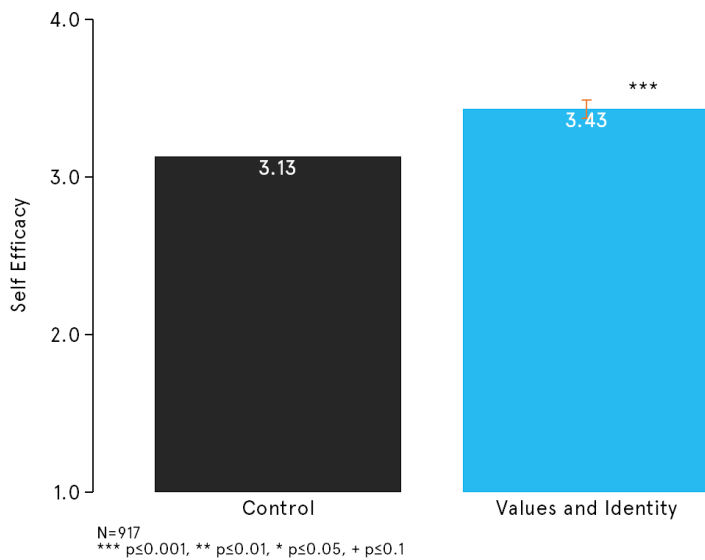
Figure 10: Effect of a completing a values and identity exercise on teachers' self-efficacy

Consistent with previous studies, an exercise asking teachers to affirm their values and to reflect on their roles as teachers significantly increased self-efficacy. This effect was larger for the most vulnerable groups: Burundians, women, and non-secondary school teachers (who are generally less educated). The main reason for the disproportionate impact on these groups may be that they had a lower self-perception to begin with, leaving more room for improvement or making them more receptive to interventions targeting their self-image. Moreover, these groups may face greater negative stereotypes or have a weaker sense of belonging to the teaching community – two negative mindsets that the literature suggest can be overcome by affirming one's values.[xxiii] The latter may be particularly true for Burundians, who arrived recently in the camp.

What this means for future programming

Learnings from this experiment will be incredibly valuable to inform the design of a more robust program to reduce corporal punishment by teachers. Three lessons stand out:

- Rights and rules-based messages may be effective at driving enrollment for voluntary initiatives or training programs, particularly for Burundian and secondary-school teachers. Conveying that participation is expected may amplify the effectiveness of this strategy, especially in cultures where rule following is the norm.
- While a focus on rights and rules may improve compliance in visible ways (such as enrollment in a program or attendance), it is not effective at changing teachers' attitudes or beliefs. Once we have teachers' attention, exposing them to content that can effectively shift their beliefs and intentions will be important if we are to change behavior. Among the strategies evaluated in this study, building empathy towards children is the most successful way to decrease favorable attitudes towards corporal punishment, especially among men and primary school teachers. As a result, integrating an empathy-based approach to discouraging corporal punishment into IRC teacher trainings holds promise for reducing the incidence of corporal punishment.

- Including a focus on values and identity into programs for teachers can increase their self-efficacy. This in turn, can boost their capacity to implement new learnings and improve outcomes for children.

Looking ahead

We gained valuable information that can help inform the design of a program to accomplish our second goal: supporting teachers to follow through with their intention to change by adopting positive disciplinary methods. (See Appendix 4 for more detailed information on additional findings.)

First, during the next phase of work we intend to leverage light-touch cognitive behavioral therapy techniques and work with teachers to identify their triggers and adopt alternative positive discipline strategies for managing the classroom and promoting the wellbeing of themselves and their students. Specifically, this curriculum would include a series of individual and group exercises focused on understanding the principles of classroom management, social and emotional regulation, identifying personal triggers, planning for various situations, and overcoming setbacks. Recent prototyping of this content revealed several useful insights that we will take forward in future testing and implementation. For instance, we learned that teachers may be more receptive to shorter activities and smaller activity workbooks, which they can carry with them. We also learned that teachers prefer to engage with the content both individually – to allow time for reflection – and in a group setting with colleagues – to allow for further deliberation and discussion. Future prototyping will allow us to fine tune the content, format, and delivery of the behavioral therapy techniques.

Moreover, the scenario-based survey of attitudes towards corporal punishment helped us understand which offenses teachers think are most deserving of physical punishment. These mostly consist of student behaviors that erode the teachers' sense of being respected, such as insulting or talking back to the teacher. We will use this information to hone in on the misbehaviors most likely to trigger the use of violence (e.g., those eliciting a sense of being disrespected) and design a tailored toolkit to support teachers in using evidence-based and contextually-adapted strategies to control their thoughts, feelings, and automatic behaviors, and empower teachers to build respect through positive means.

In order to promote habit formation and sustained change over time, the next phase of work could also entail simplifying the school code – to clearly indicate appropriate punishments and rewards for student behavior – and publicly posting these rules in the classroom. Our finding suggesting publicly signaling compliance with rules is important for Nyarugusu teachers lends further support for this approach. Furthermore, the demographic survey given to all teachers revealed that 92% who attended the intervention sessions have phones, 30% of which are smartphones. In light of this, we plan to use digital content, reinforce key messages, and send timely reminders via SMS. Future prototyping will shed light on the context-specific messages that work best at eliciting teacher engagement and behavior change, while building on current learning (e.g., we may send texts about teachers' values or key takeaways from the empathy module to reinforce content proven to build self-efficacy and positively shift attitudes on the use of corporal punishment).

Additionally, based on the evidence generated from this round of testing, we intend to integrate the effective intervention elements – a values affirmation exercise and empathy-building exercises – into

existing IRC programming aimed at transforming social norms and changing practices promoting corporal punishment against children.

Finally, we hope our learnings may benefit other practitioners and policymakers seeking to prevent and reduce violence against children, as rigorous research into the pathways to changing attitudes about corporal punishment is so far lacking.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Demographic information of study participants

	Module							
	Overall		Empathy		Clinical		Control	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Attendence	1042	74%	348	74%	344	73%	350	74%
Male	797	77%	253	34%	258	34%	244	32%
Female	243	23%	75	32%	74	32%	83	36%
Congolese	602	58%	198	57%	195	57%	209	60%
Burundian	440	42%	150	43%	149	43%	141	40%
Secondary	241	29%	81	24%	81	24%	79	23%
Not Secondary	782	71%	257	76%	258	76%	267	77%
Save the Children	83	8%	33	9%	24	7%	26	7%

Appendix 2: Scales Used to Measure Attitudes Towards Corporal Punishment

Values-Based Survey (Attitudes Towards Hitting)

There should be a law forbidding teachers to hit their students.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It's not really pleasant, but teachers have a duty to hit their students if it's necessary.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It's wrong for teachers to hit their students (i.e., it's not right to do it).	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Some students need to be hit so they will learn to behave themselves (i.e., learn good behavior).	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

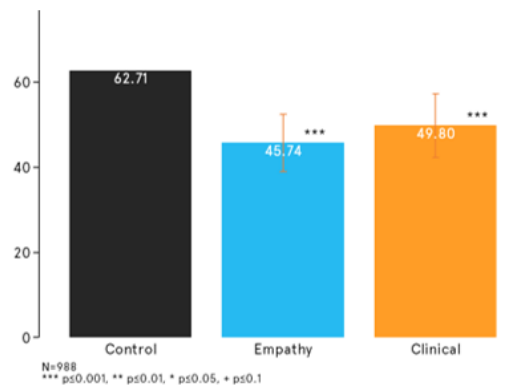Scenarios-Based Survey ("Scenario Attitudes Towards Hitting")

Do you think that hitting a student would be acceptable in the following cases?				
If the student is interrupting class	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student talks back to the teacher	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student runs away from school	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student is late from school	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student is mean to other students	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student insults the teacher	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student is not taking notes	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student steals	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If the student fights with other students	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

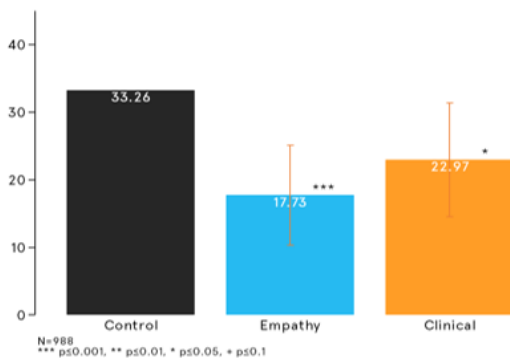Appendix 3: Effect of different modules on teacher's responses to specific values-based survey questions

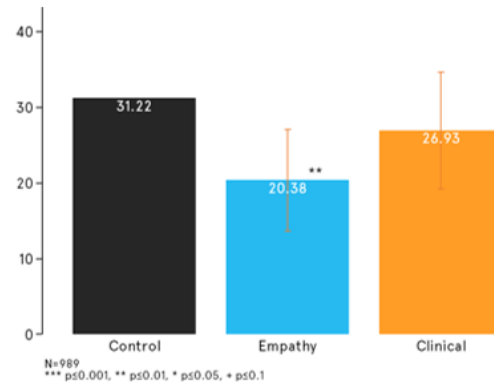**It's not really pleasant, but teachers have a duty to hit their students if it's necessary.**
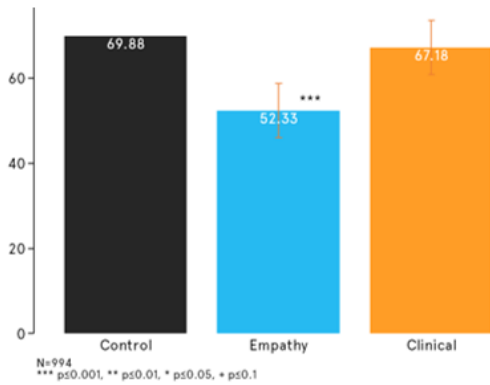
(Control: 69.88, Empathy: 52.33 ***, Clinical: 67.18)

N=994
*** p≤0.001, ** p≤0.01, * p≤0.05, + p≤0.1

Some students need to be hit so they will learn to behave themselves (i.e., learn good behavior).

(Control: 62.71, Empathy: 45.74 ***, Clinical: 49.80 ***)

N=988
*** p≤0.001, ** p≤0.01, * p≤0.05, + p≤0.1

There should be a law forbidding teachers to hit their students

(Control: 33.26, Empathy: 17.73 ***, Clinical: 22.97 *)

N=988
*** p≤0.001, ** p≤0.01, * p≤0.05, + p≤0.1

It's wrong for teachers to hit their students (i.e., it's not right to do it).

(Control: 31.22, Empathy: 20.38 **, Clinical: 26.93)

N=989
*** p≤0.001, ** p≤0.01, * p≤0.05, + p≤0.1

Appendix 4: Summary of Additional interesting Findings
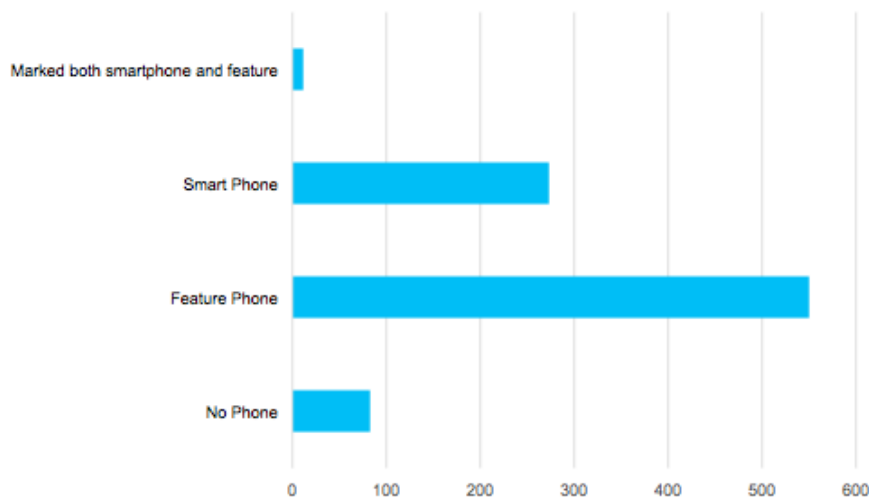
Most punishable offenses

Average answers to question: Do you think that hitting a student would be acceptable in the following cases?
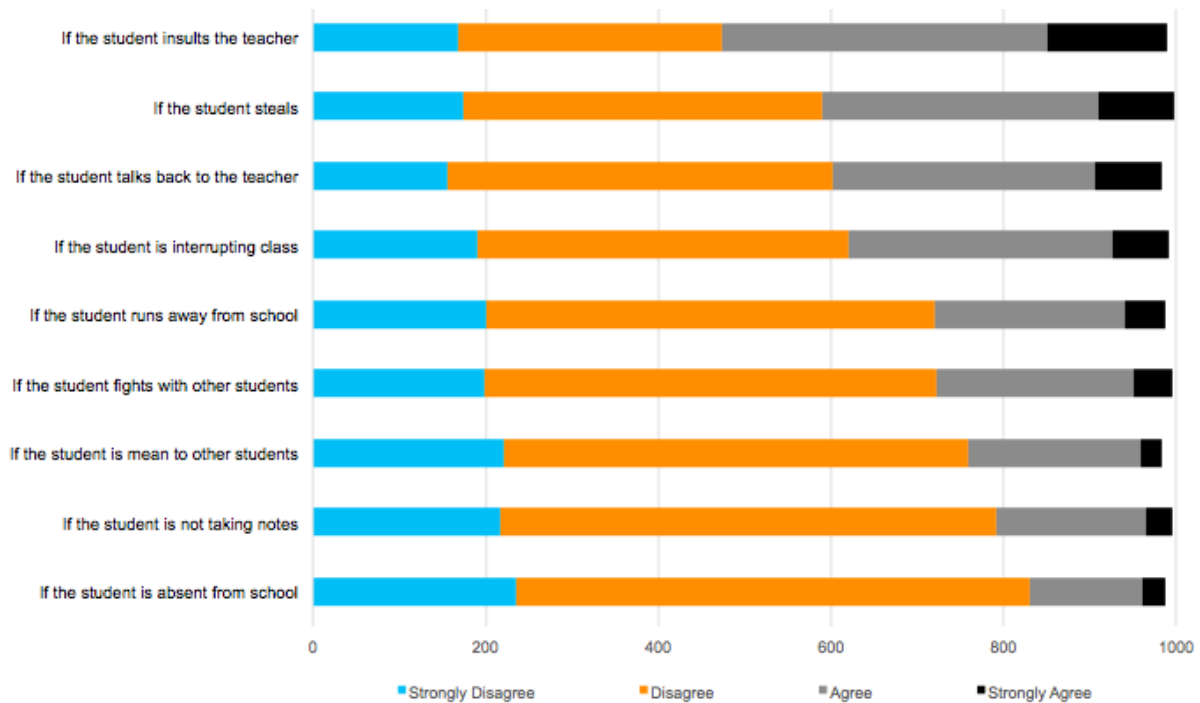
Mobile phone use

The following graph shows the number of teachers with phones by category.

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