

Voices on Violence

Physical Violence

"Why did my mother do this to me?" Robert asked his uncle, as he lightly touched the scar on his hand. "Does she not like me? Why does she hate me so much?"

"What happened?" his uncle asked.

"It happened last year," he said, still rubbing the scar. "I will teach you a lesson," she shouted, as she slapped me, he continued. She put a knife on the charcoal stove and said 'I sent you to get tomatoes and you delayed as if I have got all day to wait for you?' She held my hand tightly and then I remembered what she had done to my sister. I screamed to attract attention but no one came to help me. She placed the red-hot knife on my arm.

"This is violence," his uncle said. "It shouldn't have happened to you."

"It happens against many children, not just me," Robert said. "I saw a boy being caned at school for wearing shoes that were torn yet he did not get money from his father to buy a new pair. I saw our neighbour beating his daughter because she was singing too loudly," Robert said sadly. "Big people beat children all the time."

"But not all adults are like that," his uncle said. "Some really do care about children."

Robert knew his uncle was right but that did not cool his anger. "Even as I look at this scar," he went on, "I don't think this burning taught me what I did wrong. It just made me scared of her and made me think that she doesn't like me. It made me feel that I want to grow up fast so nobody can treat me like this again."

"Maybe when you grow up, you won't treat your children like this," his uncle said.

Robert thought about that for a while and then thoughtfully responded, "maybe".

In a study completed this year, more than 98% of the 1400 children consulted said they had experienced physical violence. More than one in six said that they had been burnt as a form of punishment.

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