

Voices on Violence

What kind of relationships do you want to create with children?

"I am so scared when he is around," Rehana said. "He looks at me with hot eyes even if I laugh a little louder than he would like me to. My father says that he should not have to raise his hand for me to understand that he is not happy with my behaviour. A look, he says, should be enough."

"Yes, my mother is like that too," added her friend. She shouts at me all the time and says that children should be seen and not heard. Every time I am around her, I feel so nervous. I wonder what she will find to criticise. She insults me in front of everyone and laughs about how stupid I am. "Who will pay bride-price for her?" she asks our neighbour. It makes me feel so ashamed.

"My father says that children are foolish and make mistakes all the time," Rehana responded. "They can't be trusted to make good decisions unless you control them. He told our neighbour that if he spares the rod, he would spoil his child."

"I wish he would listen to me before beating me all the time," Rehana said. "A small mistake-slap! Laugh too loud, a cane! Many times I don't even know why he is beating me. It makes me feel angry with him and I feel scared of him instead of loving him as my father. I wish he could see that I am not stupid. I can make good decisions."

"I wish," Rehana continued "that he was like my older brother who always listens and encourages me when he visits us."

"And sometimes," her friend added, "I wish my mother would smile at me and tell me that she cares about me. I wish she would do anything to show me that she loves me instead of just slaps and insults."

"I wish more adults were like my brother," Rehana said.

"Do you think we will ever get our wish?" they asked each other.

In a study completed recently, more than 70% of the adults said they punished children to instil fear and almost 45% said to instil shame in children. However, more than half of the adults and a third of the teachers doubted if this method would bring about the desired change in children.

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