RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Foot Whipping as Gendered Educational Discipline: Female Students' Experiences in Korean Schools and Homes

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## Abstract

**This study examines foot whipping as a gendered and ritualized form of corporal punishment in South Korean educational and familial contexts, focusing on its operational mechanisms and the subjective experiences of female students. Drawing on over thirty online narrative posts from the 2000s to 2010s, a crowdsourced encyclopedia entry, and a parental account, this qualitative study employs an integrated framework of Humiliation Theory and a Trauma-Informed Perspective, analyzed through qualitative content analysis and online narrative analysis. The findings reveal that foot whipping operates through a mechanism of "delayed somatic persistence of punishment," which consists of three progressive layers: ritualized humiliation through enforced bodily exposure, delayed reactivation of pain through walking, and the somatic consolidation of punishment-related responses. The study further identifies a system of justificatory discourse that includes gendered logic, health discourse, effect logic, and perpetrator self-defense strategies. Victims' narratives, in contrast, report experiences of acute pain, shame, a sense of injustice, dissociation, and conditioned avoidance responses. The findings indicate that within these sampled online narratives, foot whipping emerges as a culturally encoded punitive practice directed at female students, sustained by cultural narratives that frame pain as pedagogical and female bodies as requiring shame-based correction. This study contributes to the literature by introducing the concept of delayed somatic persistence, highlighting the gender dimension of corporal punishment, and offering a trauma-informed reading of how educational violence is perpetuated through bodily practices. It concludes that legal prohibition alone is insufficient and that meaningful change requires a fundamental cultural shift in how pain, discipline, and bodily integrity are understood in educational and familial settings.**

**Keywords**: corporal punishment, foot whipping, South Korean education, trauma-informed perspective, humiliation theory.

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## 1 Introduction

In the process of advancing education in South Korea during the 21st century, corporal punishment has been strictly prohibited by the government through legislative measures. Since the enactment of the Civil Code in 1958, Article 915 explicitly stipulated the custodian's right of discipline: "The custodian may administer necessary discipline for the protection or education of their child." School corporal punishment was also implicitly recognized as a routine means of educational management, and the notion of corporal punishment as "an inevitable way to educate children" remained deeply entrenched in social perceptions.

In 2010, Gyeonggi Province became the first in South Korea to pass the Student Human Rights Ordinance, which prohibited school corporal punishment at the local level. The ordinance stipulated that elementary and secondary schools within its jurisdiction could not administer corporal punishment, compulsory supplementary classes, or restrictions on students' hairstyles and attire, while also granting students the right to participate in school decision-making. Following Gyeonggi Province, Gwangju passed a similar student human rights ordinance in 2011, Seoul followed in 2012, and North Jeolla Province in 2013. In 2015, Article 5(2) of the Child Welfare Act was amended to explicitly stipulate that guardians shall not "inflict physical pain or mental distress, including violent language," upon children. In 2020, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea finalized the decision to delete the disciplinary provision of Article 915 of the Civil Code and gave legislative notice to that effect. On January 8, 2021, the National Assembly officially passed the civil law amendment, abolishing the disciplinary provision that had been in place since 1958. Research on Korean families likewise links parental physical punishment to child behavior problems [1].

With this, the prohibitive provisions of Article 5(2) of the Child Welfare Act became fully applicable across all settings—including both families and schools—meaning that corporal punishment no longer retains any legal justification in any context. In announcing the civil law revision, the government stated: "The prohibition of parental corporal punishment of children is the most fundamental provision for preventing child abuse… The National Assembly's passage of the legislative amendment is expected to provide an opportunity to fundamentally improve society's awareness of child corporal punishment and child abuse."

However, shifting long-standing traditions takes time, and the enactment of laws cannot serve as a universal solution; incidents of corporal punishment therefore persist. Within the broader discourse on corporal punishment in Korean society, a specific practice has long remained on the margins of attention: foot whipping.

Compared to more common target areas such as the palms, buttocks, or calves, the soles of the feet are perceived by some educators and parents as a "safer," "more civilized," and even "healthier" form of punishment. This perception stems from the belief that strikes to the soles leave no visible marks, combined with certain traditional anatomical beliefs rooted in Hanbang (traditional Korean medicine). Such beliefs persist within a broader culture in which corporal punishment has been practiced in Korean classrooms for centuries and defended as a way of preserving established cultural norms, even as reform efforts seek to protect students' integrity and rights [2].

Yet, this seemingly mild rhetoric conceals the unique harm inflicted by foot whipping. Foot whipping is not merely the infliction of physical pain—it is a ritual of humiliation that systematically degrades the dignity of the individual. Beyond causing immediate pain during the act, it embeds suffering into the most mundane of daily activities, such as walking, creating a form of delayed and persistently echoing traumatic memory.

This study focuses on foot whipping directed at female students in both secondary schools (middle and high schools) and family settings in South Korea, where they occupy the dual roles of students and daughters. Gender serves as a central analytical dimension here, as existing materials indicate that foot whipping has long been culturally coded in Korean educational practices as a form of punishment suitable for girls. Whether reflected in encyclopedia-style descriptions on knowledge-sharing websites, explicit statements in parental accounts, or gender-differentiated practices observed in student posts, the evidence consistently points to the same reality: within these sampled online narratives, foot whipping emerges as a culturally encoded punitive practice directed at female students.

Behind this gendered choice lie the real, yet often unheard, experiences of those subjected to it. Scattered across the internet are numerous anonymous posts in which female students recount physical memories of removing their socks, exposing the soles of their feet, and enduring strikes—on classroom podiums, in teachers' offices, or in living rooms at home. These

fragmented experiences point to a deeper theoretical question: How exactly does foot whipping produce harm? Why is it particularly recommended for girls, and why do girls' own narratives reveal complex entanglements of pain and shame, anger and silence, resistance and submission?

Addressing these questions carries significant academic implications. First, it helps fill the empirical gap in Korean corporal punishment research regarding the physical and psychological impacts of foot whipping. Second, by integrating theories of humiliation and trauma-informed perspectives, this study proposes the analytical concept of "delayed somatic persistence of punishment," revealing the distinctive mechanism through which foot whipping operates compared to other forms of corporal punishment. Third, it highlights the long-overlooked gender dimension in studies of corporal punishment, demonstrating how educational violence is perpetuated through gendered discourses and practices.

At the same time, this research aims to contribute resources for critical reflection in educational practice, emphasizing that education need not rely on the infliction of pain.

## 2 Related Work

### 2.1 Overall Exposition

The impact of corporal punishment on students has long been a focus of research in educational studies. Existing research has primarily developed along two lines: the association between corporal punishment and behavioral problems, and the long-term psychological effects of corporal punishment. In terms of behavior, corporal punishment not only fails to improve student conduct but may even exacerbate problematic behaviors. There is a significant positive correlation between teacher-administered corporal punishment and insincere (non-diligent) behaviors in students' school lives, while corporal punishment shows a negative correlation with students' perceived teacher support and sense of school belonging. Corporal punishment not only directly predicts behavioral issues but also exerts indirect influence by undermining students' positive perceptions of teachers and the school [3]. In other words, the educational effect of corporal punishment is contrary to its original intent—rather than fostering students' acceptance of rules, it damages teacher-student relationships and a sense of school belonging.

This finding is corroborated by conclusions from longitudinal studies. A tracking study involving 4,051 Korean middle school students (grades 7–9) employed an autoregressive cross-lagged model to reveal a bidirectional cycle between students' aggressive behaviors and teachers' use of corporal punishment: students' aggressive behaviors can trigger corporal punishment from teachers, which in turn further aggravates students' aggression [4]. This finding challenges the unidirectional causal assumption that "corporal punishment is a justifiable response to behavioral problems," showing that corporal punishment is not a solution but part of the reproduction of the problem.

On a psychological level, the impact of corporal punishment is even more profound. Reviews of school corporal punishment worldwide link it not only to immediate physical pain and injury but also to poorer mental health, lower academic engagement, and heightened aggression [5]. Some studies particularly point out that these effects do not cease with the end of corporal punishment; those subjected to it may internalize patterns of violent behavior and replicate them in the future as parents or teachers. This intergenerational transmission effect makes corporal punishment a self-perpetuating phenomenon.

It is worth noting that corporal punishment exhibits an extremely high prevalence in certain educational contexts. For instance, among Korean middle and high school gymnasts, 96% of respondents reported experiencing corporal punishment, with practices lacking reasonable standards in terms of instruments, frequency, intensity, and settings [6]. This statistic indicates that in competitive sports, a field emphasizing discipline and obedience, corporal punishment has become a normalized disciplinary tool. The same study also found a significant correlation between coaches' behavior and the acceptance of corporal punishment, with gender differences observed. It is a finding that resonates with this study's focus on the gendered dimension of foot whipping.

### 2.2 Reflection on Existing Research

Research on corporal punishment in South Korea reveals several noteworthy characteristics. Existing studies have primarily focused on the general prevalence of corporal punishment and its behavioral consequences, often treating corporal punishment as a homogeneous category, with little distinction made between the differential experiences associated with different target areas such as the palms, buttocks,

calves, or soles of the feet. While the aforementioned study on gymnasts highlighted the high incidence of corporal punishment, it employed survey methods that struggled to capture the deeper psychological experiences of those subjected to it. The subjective experiences of the punished remain inadequately heard. Although quantitative research can reveal the prevalence and correlating factors of corporal punishment, it fails to address a core question: How does corporal punishment feel? How is it experienced, remembered, and narrated? This subjective dimension is crucial for understanding the psychological impact of corporal punishment, yet it has long remained at the margins of academic inquiry. Similarly, studies on the cyclical relationship between corporal punishment and aggressive behavior, despite their methodological rigor, cannot fully explain the mechanisms through which corporal punishment inflicts psychological harm.

Moreover, while the gendered dimension of corporal punishment has been occasionally noted in existing research, it has yet to be systematically theorized. Studies of Korean athletes have examined which factors shape the acceptance of corporal punishment, such as the controllability of the punished behavior [7], and the gymnast study above reported gender differences [6], a finding that intriguingly echoes the preliminary observation in this study that "foot whipping is widely perceived as suitable for females." Although scattered research has pointed to gender differences in corporal punishment, questions such as how foot whipping came to be constructed as a form of punishment appropriate for girls, how this construction legitimizes the disciplining of female bodies, and how subjected females experience and narrate this process have not received scholarly attention. Existing research has also not delved deeper into questions such as: Why might females report different levels of acceptance of such punishments? Is this genuine acceptance, or is it internalized compliance under conditions of power asymmetry? How do gendered differences in corporal punishment manifest in the specific body parts targeted, the tools used, and the rituals involved? These questions remain unanswered.

## 3 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrated framework of Humiliation Theory and the Trauma-Informed Perspective to analyze the subject of investigation. The rationale for constructing this framework lies in the fact that the harm inflicted by foot whipping extends beyond the immediate physical pain of the act itself, creating a delayed and persistent form of harm through rituals of humiliation and the mechanism of walking. Humiliation Theory provides a conceptual tool to analyze how dignity is unjustly diminished, while the trauma-informed perspective offers theoretical insights into how the body remembers and responds to such degradation. The integration of these two approaches helps reveal the unique operational logic of foot whipping, distinguishing it from other forms of corporal punishment.

According to Humiliation Theory, humiliation differs from shame: the former is an externally imposed, unjust degradation, while the latter is an internal sense of self-negation [8]. In the context of foot whipping, what the subject experiences is the former, a form of institutionalized physical punishment administered by an authority figure, often with a disproportionate severity relative to the triggering incident, and without the subject's ability to challenge this imbalance. Humiliation is classically described as an enforced lowering of a person through subjugation by a more powerful party [9]. Building on this, this study treats three elements as central to the destructiveness of humiliation: power asymmetry, a sense of injustice, and the presence of an audience. In foot whipping practices, all three elements are manifest: the teacher or parent holds absolute power in defining the offense and determining the punishment, while the student or child lacks the right to question its legitimacy; the punishment is often carried out in the name of education, yet its public nature introduces a performative, observed dimension; and the forced exposure of the feet, which is a typically concealed body part, further intensifies the humiliation.

The Trauma-Informed Perspective provides a complementary framework for understanding the long-term consequences of foot whipping. A traumatized body "remembers" the harm through conditioned responses, hypervigilance, dissociation, and other mechanisms, even if the conscious mind has forgotten or repressed the experience [10]. What makes foot whipping distinctive is that it embeds this bodily memory into the most mundane of physical acts: walking. In other words, the punishment does not end with the strike; rather, it is perpetuated through the unavoidable, daily activity of walking. This design turns the body of the punished into the executor of the punishment. Each step, with the

contact between the sole and the ground, triggers pain, and the pain automatically links back to the cognition of "I have done something wrong." From a trauma-informed viewpoint, an inescapable, repeatedly experienced, and daily-behavior-bound painful memory constitutes a classic mechanism of trauma formation.

By integrating these two theoretical approaches, a model of "Delayed Somatic Persistence of Punishment" can be constructed for analyzing foot whipping. This model posits that the mechanism of foot whipping operates through three progressive layers. The first is the enactment of humiliation, wherein the punished is required to remove footwear and expose the soles. The second is the delayed release of pain, where the pain from the strike is repeatedly "reactivated" over the following hours or even days, transforming the humiliation from a discrete event into a sustained state. The third is the somatic consolidation of punishment-related responses: prolonged foot whipping may lead to fear or avoidance responses to specific stimuli, forming what the trauma-informed perspective refers to as somatic memory.

### 3.2 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, specifically combining Qualitative Content Analysis and Online Narrative Analysis. The subjective experiences of the punished and the bodily memories of trauma are highly contextualized phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through predetermined quantitative indicators or closed-ended questionnaires. Instead, they require a systematic yet open-ended way of classifying and interpreting the content of naturally occurring texts, which is what qualitative content analysis provides [11]. Online Narrative Analysis complements this by examining how narrators construct meaning and by addressing the nuances of anonymity in online spaces, historical context, and interactive dynamics. The integration of these two methods ensures analytical rigor and traceability while remaining open to the richness of narrative expression.

The materials for this study are drawn from three types of texts, each serving a distinct function in the research design. Online posts constitute the main body of data, sourced from Korean online communities such as Naver Cafe. The anonymity of these platforms allows narrators to discuss sensitive topics with relatively low social risk, and they preserve a large volume of first-person accounts spanning extended periods with rich detail. The purpose of analyzing this data is to capture the subjective experiences of the punished, including emotional responses, bodily memories, and evaluations of perpetrators and the punishment itself. These posts, numbering over thirty, span the period from 2003 to 2014, covering the years surrounding the formal ban on school corporal punishment in South Korea in 2011. The posters were predominantly female middle and high school students.

Knowledge-base and encyclopedic descriptions serve as sources of collectively accumulated information, primarily drawn from entries such as 발바닥 체벌 (*balbadak chebeol*, "sole punishment") on knowledge-sharing platforms like Namuwiki (나무위키). The characteristics of these texts include the accumulation of collective experiences and the presentation of seemingly objective knowledge in a generalized form. The analysis of this data aims to reveal the common perceptions of foot whipping in Korean society. The specific chapter on foot whipping was last revised in April 2026.

Narratives of punishment administrators include posts from figures such as teachers or parents published in online spaces, describing and justifying their implementation of foot whipping on children. While the previous texts represent the voices of the punished, these texts reflect the perspectives of the administrators. The analysis of this data aims to uncover the discourses used to legitimize corporal punishment from the enforcers' standpoint. Notably, a lengthy post from the Miz forum, published in March 2007 by a mother of twin daughters, garnered over 77,000 views.

The collected posts were primarily published between 2003 and the 2010s. In 2011, South Korea amended the Enforcement Decree of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to prohibit direct corporal punishment in schools. Thus, posts from 2003–2010 reflect the normalized state of corporal punishment as a routine educational practice before the ban. During this period, the legitimacy of corporal punishment was less publicly contested. After 2011, as the legal prohibition took effect and social attitudes shifted, the discourse in online posts also changed.

The data screening process began with keyword searches (e.g., 발바닥 체벌, 여학생 체벌, 학교 체벌 발) on target platforms to collect all potentially relevant posts. Posts passing initial screening were read in full and evaluated against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Subsequently, texts were coded sentence by sentence. Whenever a new unit of meaning emerged,

**Table 1.** Illustrative examples of the qualitative coding process.

| Original Text (Translated) | Initial Code | Analytical Category | Higher-order Theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| Whipping of the soles is mainly used for the discipline of girls or female adolescents | Gender-specific punishment | Gendered justification | Technologized justificatory discourse |
| Kneeling on the desk, sticking my feet out, with the whole class watching the soles | Enforced posture; exposure of soles; presence of audience | Bodily positioning and public exposure | Ritualized bodily procedures |
| Why is this necessary? | Questioning the legitimacy of punishment | Perceived injustice | Narratives of victim experience and coping |
| She was faking the pain, so I made her kneel on the table, grabbed her ankles, and hit harder | Dismissal of pain expression; physical restraint; escalation of punishment | Delegitimization of pain and punitive escalation | Technologized justificatory discourse / Ritualized bodily procedures |
| Just wanted it to end quickly, stared at the floor in a daze, counting | Attentional withdrawal; counting; passive endurance | Dissociation-like coping and endurance | Narratives of victim experience and coping |
| After the beating, the soles hurt too much to walk, and I was limping | Persistent pain; difficulty walking; limping | Post-punishment walking impairment | Delayed somatic persistence of punishment |
| Every step made my soles sting and reminded me of what had happened | Pain reactivated through walking | Recurrent pain during everyday movement | Delayed somatic persistence of punishment |
| I am unwilling to take off my shoes in front of others and do not want to go to swimming class | Avoidance of barefoot exposure; avoidance of related situations | Persistent avoidance response | Delayed somatic persistence of punishment |

it was compared with previously identified codes: if similar, it was grouped under an existing code; if distinct, a new code was created. The codes generated at this stage were concrete and closely aligned with the text. These specific codes were then categorized into higher-level thematic categories during the axial coding phase, guided by the theoretical framework to establish connections between concrete codes and theoretical concepts. Finally, core themes were distilled from the axial codes to form the central axis of the analysis [12]. Examples are shown in Table 1. Coding was conducted by the author, who continuously kept analytical memos throughout the process to document the trajectory of concept generation and category formation. To enhance the credibility and verifiability of the coding, a research assistant trained in qualitative research methods independently coded approximately 20% of the sampled texts. The two coders then compared and discussed their respective coding results. Disagreements were resolved through negotiation by revisiting the original texts, clarifying conceptual definitions, and anchoring the discussion in the research questions until consensus was reached. For the minority of cases where agreement could not be achieved, these items were confirmed after careful deliberation.

Based on the qualitative coding analysis of the above texts, this study gradually reveals the operational mechanism and traumatic consequences of foot whipping. The analysis of the coding results unfolds across four progressive categories: ritualized bodily procedures, technologized justificatory discourse, the victim's trauma narrative, and delayed somatic persistence of punishment as the core theme.

## 4 Research Findings

### 4.1 Ritualized Bodily Procedures

The ritual of corporal punishment intensifies both the physical and psychological suffering of the punished. Overall, the ritualistic elements include body posture, removal of footwear and socks, selection of striking tools and target areas, quantification of the number and rhythm of strikes, and post-punishment requirements.

Regarding body posture, Namuwiki explicitly documents three standard postures: kneeling on the podium or desk with feet extended outward, lying prone on a desk or the floor with one or both feet raised backward, and standing while holding onto the blackboard with one foot raised backward. The parental account explains the reason for using the kneeling-on-desk posture, stating that it avoids face-to-face contact with the punished, preventing the punisher from becoming soft-hearted or leaving a bad impression on the child. Student posts reveal

more variations, including kneeling on a chair, lying on a mat with arms wrapped around the knees, and turning to face the blackboard with the soles facing the entire class. Regardless of the posture, a common feature is that the soles are placed in the sight of others, and the punished person's body is fixed, making it difficult to move or avoid the punishment.

All accounts mention being required to remove socks and shoes. In the accounts of female students, this step is more humiliating, especially when the removal is forced after resistance. The act of removing socks exposes the soles, a usually covered body part, laying the foundation for subsequent humiliation.

The striking tools are diverse, including rattan canes, wooden rulers, bamboo sticks, and everyday objects such as long drum sticks and PVC pipes. Student posts provide specific descriptions such as a thirty-centimeter wooden stick, a sixty-centimeter rattan cane, a long drum stick, and a sandalwood stick.

The target area of the strikes is also clearly specified. The encyclopedia text points out that strikes are mainly applied to the center of the sole or the concave Yongquan acupoint, because the fleshless nature of the sole makes it the most painful area. The parental account offers more detailed guidance: avoid the heel to prevent bone injury, strike primarily the arch and the area where the sole connects to the toes, and use a relative force of ten for the arch area and twelve to thirteen for the ball of the foot, justifying that the ball of the foot has thicker flesh and should be struck harder to achieve the goal of prompting reflection while walking.

Regarding the number and rhythm of strikes, the encyclopedia text notes that striking the same area more than five times consecutively allows one to experience "pain beyond hell" and states that exceeding fifty or even one hundred strikes is routine in professional Taekwondo athlete training. The parental account provides clearer standards: to achieve a level where one cannot walk properly that day, it is usually necessary to strike vigorously twenty to thirty times; after children enter high school, at least fifty strikes are needed; for serious infractions, striking until redness and swelling are visibly apparent, approximately one hundred strikes, is required. Student posts report both rhythms: rapid consecutive strikes, and slow, powerful strikes, each one delivered with full force.

The post-punishment requirements are the final step of the ritualized procedure and a key link to the delayed somatic persistence of punishment discussed later. The encyclopedia text describes requirements such as walking barefoot after being hit, living barefoot after being hit, and not being allowed to wear socks after being hit. The parental account makes this an explicit rule among eight rules: live barefoot on the day the soles are hit, explaining the reason: wearing socks reduces the pain felt while walking and diminishes the effect of reflection. It becomes evident that striking the sole directly incorporates subsequent walking behavior into the continuation of the punishment.

### 4.2 Technologized Justificatory Discourse

The long-standing existence of foot whipping in Korean educational culture is attributable not only to its ritualized operational procedures but also to its support by a sophisticated system of justificatory discourse.

Gendered logic serves as the cornerstone of this discourse. The encyclopedia text explicitly states at the outset: "Whipping of the soles is mainly used for the discipline of girls or female adolescents." The parental account writes: "Because they are girls, hit the soles where marks do not show," and "especially for daughters, foot whipping is better." Student posts repeatedly present observations of gender differentiation: "Boys get hit on the buttocks, girls get hit on the soles," "Because she was the only girl, she got hit on the soles," "In coeducational schools, boys get hit on the palms or buttocks, while girls get hit on the soles." The implicit premise of this logic is that girls' bodies should not bear bruises or scars. Transferring corporal punishment to the soles satisfies the requirement of punishment while maintaining the integrity of the girl's body, at least on the visible surface. However, the numerous reports of bruises, swelling, and bleeding in student posts directly contradict this claim. One student wrote: "For the first time in my life, I got a bruise on my sole, and it even cracked and bled." Another student wrote: "My foot swelled up to twice its normal size, and I could not even walk." The logic of leaving no trace is fragile in practice; the soles do not truly show no marks, but rather the marks are concealed.

Health discourse is a highly deceptive component of the justificatory discourse. The encyclopedia text claims that foot whipping improves blood circulation and has the effect of enhancing vitality. The parental account states: "My mother also said it is good for health, and whenever I did something wrong and was punished, she always hit my soles." Student posts also relay: "The teacher said it is good for health, so he

hits the soles." This discourse redefines violence as a health practice, making corporal punishment not only acceptable but also justifiable.

Effect logic is the most distinctive feature of the justificatory discourse surrounding foot whipping. The parental account explicitly states that the choice of the soles is not only because they show no marks and are good for health, but also because it allows the child to reflect for a long time after the punishment is over. The specific mechanism is: "For a while after being hit, every step makes the sole sting, reminding the child of their mistake." The parent further explains: "It is not over when the hitting ends. After being hit, every step stings, reminding oneself of the mistake." This logic transforms punishment from a discrete event into a continuous state, a core feature distinguishing foot whipping from other forms of corporal punishment. The encyclopedia text also confirms this mechanism from a knowledge perspective: "If the bruise is dark purple, it is said that one cannot walk properly for several days." Although student posts do not directly cite this discourse, the physical experiences they describe, such as "cannot walk," "limp," and "every step hurts," are precisely the bodily operation of this mechanism.

The punisher's self-defense strategies constitute the fourth layer of the justificatory discourse. Cross-cultural research shows that where physical discipline is perceived as normative, its association with children's adjustment is moderated by that cultural normativeness [13]. This helps explain why punishers can present strict parenting, including physical punishment, as a legitimate means of building moral character and responsibility. In the parental account, before describing the punishment operations, the author declares that she has always respected her children's wishes as much as possible and has rarely scolded them severely unless it was a very serious matter, establishing an image of a good parent. She emphasizes that she absolutely does not hit based on mood and that the children know very well what situations lead to being hit, presenting the punishment as a transparent, predictable system of rules rather than arbitrary violence. She further claims that the children have no complaints, that her university sophomore daughters still receive the rattan cane without any complaint, and even that after the children graduated from high school, she asked them seriously about being hit, and they said that if it was a mistake deserving of being hit, they would accept the rattan cane even as university students, emphasizing that this is not an answer given out of submission to violence or coercion, but because they truly think that way. This claim of retrospective consent is central to the punisher's justificatory discourse. She also employs a declinism argument to defend her actions: "Looking at today's children, who are increasingly becoming uncontrollable, I feel this is especially necessary." These discursive strategies collectively construct a narrative that portrays the punisher as a rational, restrained, and loving educator.

It is worth noting that the parental account also presents a defense comparing foot whipping with other forms of corporal punishment. She writes: "Hitting the calf or buttocks would probably cause the skin to split open, but as long as you do not use a club on the soles, hitting with a rattan cane causes no harm. There is no injury to the flesh or bones." This comparative defense presents foot whipping as a safer and more civilized option, further reinforcing its legitimacy.

### 4.3 The Victim's Trauma Narrative

If the previous major category presents how perpetrators justify foot whipping, this category presents how victims experience the practice. The emotional spectrum in the students' posts is rich and complex, including pain, shame, resentment, fear, numbness, and a distinctive narrative tone. These emotional experiences form a fundamental rupture with the perpetrators' justificatory discourse.

Bodily experiences such as touch, pain, and interoceptive signals carry strong emotional weight and engage the brain networks involved in their perception and higher-order processing [14]. Pain is the most universal and immediate experience. Almost all narrators emphasize that foot whipping is "really, super painful," "feels like death," or "a hundred times more painful than a spanking." One student wrote, "I'd rather get a hundred spankings than twenty whacks on the soles." Descriptions of pain are often comparative and embodied. Compared to the palm, one student wrote, "The soles hurt much more than the hands; the intensity is different. Sometimes they bruise, sometimes they don't, but at our school they don't bruise but it hurts extremely to walk." Compared to the buttocks, another student wrote, "A spanking is a burning pain, but the soles feel like an electric shock through the whole body, both numb and painful." The encyclopedia text also confirms the particularity of the pain from a "knowledge" perspective: "The buttocks or thighs have a burning pain, while the soles of the feet cause a dizzying

sensation like an electric current flowing through the body and immense pain." This pain is not just a difference in intensity, but a fundamental difference in quality.

A sense of shame appears in numerous accounts, especially in cases of public administration. A student describing a friend's experience wrote, "She was hit in front of everyone, and she said she was so ashamed she wanted to die." Another student wrote, "Kneeling on the podium, sticking my feet out, with the whole class looking at the soles, it was so embarrassing, I wanted to crawl into a hole." The source of the shame is not just the act of being hit, but the forced exposure of the soles of the feet, a part of the body that is usually hidden. The encyclopedia text explicitly explains this mechanism: "Everyone sees the bare soles, so one feels ashamed." The sense of shame is directly related to the degree of exposure: being barefoot is more shameful than wearing socks, and having an audience is more shameful than having no audience. A student, when comparing different situations, wrote, "The first time I was hit in the teachers' office I didn't feel ashamed, but when I was hit in front of my classmates I really wanted to crawl into a hole." The encyclopedia text also points out that "dirty soles can maximize the shaming effect," and student posts include descriptions like "socks full of grime" and "dusty, blackened soles being exposed," indicating that the dirty state of the soles is deliberately used as a tool to amplify humiliation.

A sense of grievance is a third common emotional response. Multiple students expressed doubts about the legitimacy of the punishment in their narratives. After being corporally punished by a teacher for "not doing well on an exam," one student wrote, "Is not doing well on an exam a mistake? Of course, it might be because I didn't work hard, but is that itself really a mistake?" Another student wrote, "I admit I didn't do well, but isn't this kind of corporal punishment going too far?" A third student wrote, "Why?" and "Is this necessary?" This sense of grievance is different from shame—it points to the perception of "injustice" under unequal power, rather than concern for one's self-image. It is the victim's potential questioning of the legitimacy of corporal punishment, although in situations of unequal power, this questioning is rarely expressed directly to the perpetrator.

It is worth noting that not all narrators reported a sense of shame. A student, looking back on six years of middle and high school, explicitly wrote, "I just felt pain, I didn't really feel ashamed." She further questioned, "But, do you feel ashamed when you get hit on the soles of your feet?" Another student, when describing a teacher's corporal punishment, wrote, "No sense of shame, but I felt a bit bad." These cases of "denying shame" constitute an important contrast, reminding us that we cannot homogenize all experiences. The emergence of a sense of shame may depend on the specific context, such as whether there is an audience, whether socks are removed, whether one is singled out, and the individual's pre-existing attitude toward corporal punishment. The same student, when describing another teacher, mentioned "the whole class getting hit together," implying that collective punishment may weaken the individual's sense of shame.

The victims' coping strategies present a spectrum from active response to passive numbness. At the active response level, students described "curling toes to reduce pain" or "pulling feet away to get hit elsewhere." However, these coping behaviors are often identified and negated by the perpetrator. A student described, "She was faking the pain, so I made her kneel on the table, grabbed her ankles, and hit her harder." Another student wrote, "The teacher said, 'What are you pretending for? Because you're pretending, I'll hit you even harder.' " This "accusation of faking" redefines the victim's expression of pain as "dishonesty" or "playing tricks," thereby justifying the escalation of punishment. At the level of passive endurance, multiple students described a state of silence, "not daring to speak," "not daring to cry out," and "just having to endure it." A student wrote, "I didn't dare tell my parents; they don't know I was hit on the soles." A deeper coping strategy is numbness and dissociation. A student wrote, "I'm used to it," and "I'm already numb." Another student's description was more characteristic of dissociation: "staring at the floor in a daze," "counting," "mind going blank," and "just thinking about it ending quickly." These descriptions indicate that in the face of inescapable pain, the victim's consciousness chooses to "leave" the scene in order to endure the inescapable humiliation and pain. Such silent endurance is consistent with the observation that victims of humiliation often passively accept an unjust devaluation of the self rather than contesting it [15].

There is also a special narrative tone worth noting. Some narrators use a relaxed, teasing, or even gleeful tone when describing their own or others' pain, frequently using "ㅋ" (lol). A student, when recounting a friend's experience of being hit, wrote,

"She cried ㅋㅋ." Another student, when describing being hit, wrote, "It really, super hurts, haha," using both a crying and a relaxed tone. This tone may function as a psychological defense mechanism, using a relaxed tone to talk about pain in order to maintain psychological distance from it.

### 4.4 Delayed Somatic Persistence of Punishment

The previous three sections have respectively presented the operational procedures, justificatory discourse, and victim experiences of foot whipping. This section argues that these three coding categories collectively point to a single mechanism: delayed somatic persistence of punishment. This mechanism is a distinctive feature of foot whipping that sets it apart from other forms of corporal punishment, and it represents the central theoretical contribution of this study.

This mechanism operates through three progressive layers. The first layer is the ritualized administration of humiliation. Victims are required to remove shoes and socks, expose their soles, and adopt specific body postures. In the presence of an audience, the forced exposure of the soles—a "hidden body part"—demeans dignity to a symbolic minimum.

The second layer is the delayed release of pain. Since the soles of the feet continuously bear body weight during walking, the pain caused by the beating does not disappear when the punishment ends; rather, it is repeatedly "activated" over the subsequent hours or even days. Perpetrators are explicitly aware of and utilize this mechanism.

The third layer is the somatic consolidation of punishment-related responses. Long-term foot whipping can lead victims to form conditioned reflexes of fear and avoidance in response to specific stimuli. Multiple students mentioned "being scared at the sight of rattan canes" or "heart skipping a beat upon hearing similar sounds." One student wrote, "I don't dare wear shoes that expose my toes." Another wrote, "I am unwilling to take off my shoes in front of others; I don't dare go barefoot in the bathroom, and I don't want to go to swimming class." These reactions demonstrate a delayed, consolidated somatic memory.

Bodily traces on the temporal dimension serve as direct evidence of the delayed somatic effects of punishment. Short-term consequences include limping, inability to walk, bruising, bleeding, redness of the soles, and swelling.

Intergenerational transmission is another crucial dimension of the prolonged effects of punitive practices. In the parent's self-account, it is explicitly written: "My mother also hit me like this," and "I was beaten until I got married." She also compares her pain tolerance with that of her sisters: "I am much more durable than my sisters; they couldn't stand thirty strokes." This indicates that foot whipping was a normalized practice in the family she grew up in, and she has replicated this pattern onto her own children. However, expressions of intergenerational rupture also appear in the student posts. A student, after describing her own experience, wrote: "I will not hit my child like this." This rupture is both a product of post-traumatic reflection and a potential starting point for breaking the cycle of violence.

Resistance also emerged. Multiple students expressed doubts in their posts, asking, "Is this right?" or "Can I report this?" One student mentioned, "Someone reported it before, but it was useless; the teacher continued to work as usual." Another wrote, "I told my parents, and they went to find the teacher," while another noted, "Many students transferred schools." Although most of these acts of resistance failed to change the status quo, they indicate that the victims' questioning of the legitimacy of corporal punishment was not completely suppressed.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

### 5.1 Conclusion

This research concludes that foot whipping, despite being framed as a milder or traditional educational tool in Korean society, emerges from the sampled narratives as a disciplinary practice with distinct gendered patterns and psychological effects.

The data demonstrate a fundamental disjuncture between the perpetrator's perspective and the victim's experience. While parents and teachers operate under a technologized logic, believing they are applying a precise, health-oriented, and effective method of discipline, the female students' narratives reveal experiences of acute pain, shame, and a sense of injustice that stand in sharp contrast to this justificatory framework. They report not only acute physical agony but also feelings of shame, dissociation, and a reduced sense of control over their own bodies, as reflected in avoidance behaviors and conditioned fear responses.

The persistence of this practice, even after legal bans on corporal punishment, suggests that legislation alone is insufficient. The deeply ingrained cultural narratives

that pain is pedagogical, that health benefits justify violence, and that female bodies require specific forms of "shameful" correction continue to legitimize this abuse.

Ultimately, this study argues that foot whipping should be reconceptualized not as education, but as a ritualized practice that produces prolonged somatic and psychological effects. The delayed somatic persistence of the punishment extends its effects beyond the immediate act, making the pain recurrently reactivated through routine physical activities. Breaking this cycle requires not only the enforcement of legal prohibitions but also a fundamental cultural shift in how we understand pain, discipline, and the integrity of the child's body. Future interventions must address the specific gendered rhetoric that makes such violence appear acceptable to caregivers and educators.

### 5.2 Discussion

This study set out to investigate the specific mechanisms and subjective experiences of foot whipping, a gendered form of corporal punishment prevalent in South Korean educational and familial contexts. By integrating Humiliation Theory and a Trauma-Informed Perspective, the analysis reveals that foot whipping is not merely a physical corrective measure but operates through a mechanism of delayed somatic persistence that distinguishes it from other forms of corporal punishment.

First, the findings challenge the legitimizing discourse that frames foot whipping as a "safe" or "civilized" alternative to other forms of corporal punishment. While perpetrators justify the practice through narratives of safety, health benefits, and invisibility of marks, the data demonstrate that this "invisibility" functions as a tool of epistemic injustice. It allows the practice to remain hidden from external scrutiny while simultaneously producing lasting physical and psychological effects reported by the narrators. The rhetoric of "no marks" masks the reality of deep tissue pain, hematoma, and persistent somatic responses.

Second, the study points to the gendered logic embedded in the practice, which is explicitly articulated in the justificatory discourse. The ritual requiring the exposure of a hidden body part in front of an audience combines the three elements of humiliation emphasized in this study's framework—power asymmetry, a sense of injustice, and audience presence—and intensifies them through enforced bodily exposure. The convergence of these elements produces a sense of dignity loss through the enforced visibility of a usually concealed body part. The sampled narratives indicate that this practice is more frequently described in relation to female students than to male students, suggesting a cultural pattern that associates female bodies with shame management rather than merely behavioral correction.

Third, the mechanism of "delayed somatic persistence of punishment" is the core theoretical contribution of this study. Unlike a spanking, which ends when the hand stops falling, foot whipping extends the punishment into the future through the biomechanics of walking. The perpetrator deliberately utilizes the body's need to move; every step the victim takes becomes a re-enactment of the pain, forcing a somatic memory that cannot be escaped. This transforms the victim's body into the executor of the punishment, creating a cycle of hypervigilance and conditioned fear that persists long after the ritual ends.

Several limitations should be noted. The findings do not represent the experiences of all female students, but rather those experiences that were narratable under specific media and historical conditions. Additionally, the authenticity of the online posts cannot be individually verified, and the research data primarily come from the 2000s to 2010s, which may not fully reflect the current situation. Nevertheless, given the continuity of foot whipping as a "traditional" educational practice and the slow evolution of attitudes toward corporal punishment in Korean society, these data still hold significant historical and comparative value.

## Data Availability Statement

The source materials analyzed in this study were drawn from publicly accessible online content. Because the dataset contains sensitive narratives and the redistribution of compiled posts, direct quotations, URLs, or associated metadata could increase the risk of identifying individual online users, the compiled dataset is not publicly available. De-identified coding frameworks and aggregated analytical materials may be made available by the author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical considerations concerning the privacy and traceability of the original posters.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## AI Use Statement

The author declares that no generative AI was used in the preparation of this manuscript.

## Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

This study analyzed publicly accessible online materials that were available without registration in restricted groups, direct interaction with users, or researcher intervention. The study did not recruit participants, conduct interviews or surveys, or collect information directly from individuals. The analyzed materials consisted of historical online narratives, collaboratively edited knowledge-base content, and publicly accessible accounts concerning corporal punishment.

Because some of the narratives concerned experiences that occurred during childhood or adolescence and addressed potentially sensitive experiences, additional precautions were taken to minimize the risk of identification and harm. Usernames, account identifiers, exact posting dates, URLs, school names, locations, and other potentially identifying information are not reported. Individual online users are not identified or profiled, and the analysis focuses on recurring patterns across the corpus rather than on the identities of particular posters. Quotations from individual users were translated into English and, where necessary, minimally paraphrased while preserving their substantive meaning in order to reduce the possibility of reverse identification through online searches.

The study involved no direct interaction with human participants and used only materials that were publicly accessible at the time of data collection. Accordingly, individual informed consent was not obtained from the original posters. Particular care was taken in the handling and presentation of narratives concerning individuals who may have been minors at the time of the experiences described.

The research was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for internet-mediated research, including respect for contextual privacy, minimization of potential harm, and protection against unnecessary identification of online users.

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