

Chapter I

(See permission and source note page 29)

A Perspective on Behaviour Modification

Since the development of theories and “new understandings” of behaviours by notable pioneers like Dr. Benjamin Spock, the study of (child) psychology has become increasingly regarded as the basis on which new behaviour management approaches have evolved. There is no doubt that many early discoveries in psychology have had a profound and positive influence on understanding certain behaviours and the development of new approaches for behaviour modification.

Yet, even today psychology remains a disputed science, since generally nothing it offers can be proven except indirectly through observation: **empirical data**, like this study. The field is understandably prone to the development of theories that seem convincing to the casual observer, but have no basis in actuality and simply do not manifest in society.

A curious trend has emerged over the last generation. “Experts” are now espousing that the fundamental incentives that motivated human behaviour since the dawn of civilization no longer apply. Indeed, the opposites are touted. We are lead to believe that strong sanctions are “less effective” than weak ones, and using methods of “reason” are more effective than any incentive. In fact, if using reason alone is so effective for children, then it must surely be completely effective for adults, because adults are proven to be more amenable to reason than children.

Just imagine the implications of this. If this *was* true, we could effectively modify all adult behaviour through reason and counselling. Such a truly progressive society would no longer need prisons, courts, a criminal justice system or police, and could divert all the savings from the abolition of prisons to education, health care and the underprivileged.

But does that sound reasonable? That’s why due diligence must be taken before lunging headlong towards new ideologies. So why do approaches that seem so advanced and progressive so often deliver far more harm than good? The answer lays in the inherent indirect harms associated with them, as will be illustrated shortly.

Approaches:

To begin with, “one size fits all” simply does not exist because *any* approach, no matter what it is, can be highly effective and salutary for one individual and yet, anywhere from useless to harmful to another. This is why a spectrum of approaches must be used. The overall anticipated success rate is directly proportional to the depth and breadth of the spectrum of options available.

Hence, to this end I have distilled what I believe is the essence of the entire spectrum of behaviour modification approaches into something clear and simple to understand.

There are two, *and only two*, general ways in which humans can be taught and encouraged to conduct themselves in socially acceptable ways. They are ***Incentives*** and ***Reason***. No matter which approach is used; it invariably falls under one or the other, or is a hybrid of the two.

Reason:

Much of what constitutes the use of *reason* relies upon teaching through verbal and non-verbal communication. Approaches include expressing love, concern and empathy, communication, understanding, explanation, applying distraction or confusion, appealing to “common sense”, support groups, counselling, religious or moral indoctrination, public service messages, leading by example, learning by experience and observation of other’s experiences, facial expressions, body language, altering the brain’s chemical responses through medication, relaxation, hypnosis, etc. Any action that is not an incentive must fall under reason.

Incentives:

The typical responses to behaviour are called incentives, and this applies to all humans and in all settings. Incentives can be either positive or negative, and cover the entire spectrum of rewards and punishments. They appeal to a natural inclination in humans: the attraction to (greed for) pleasure and the aversion (fear) of pain. These apply whether the pleasure or pain is physical, psychological, emotional, monetary..

Positive Incentives:

Positive incentives are called *rewards* and on the most primal level appeal to greed. Greed is not limited to want for monetary or material gain; actually far from it. It refers to anything that makes one feel good about the consequence of their action. Greed includes *a want* for love or friendship, recognition, praise, awards, acceptance, knowledge, extra privileges or freedoms, and any other non-monetary reward. By appealing to an innate greed for reward, positive incentives encourage more of the same behaviour. Therein lays the incentive's value.

Negative Incentives:

Negative incentives are called punishments (consequence, disciplinary action, penalty or sanction) and on the most primal level appeal to fear. The fear they appeal to is the avoidance of a known negative consequence to a certain action. By doing so, negative incentives discourage engaging in or repeating the types of behaviour that draws such a consequence. This is known as *deterrence*, and therein lays the incentive's value.

Where the lines get blurred between Reason and Incentive:

Reason can easily transform into incentives. For example, if discussing certain behaviour becomes praise, and in so doing makes the subject feel "good" about what they have done, this has now become an incentive. In the same way, if such discussion becomes an admonition of certain behaviour, and in so doing makes the subject feel "bad" about what they have done, then once again this has become an incentive.

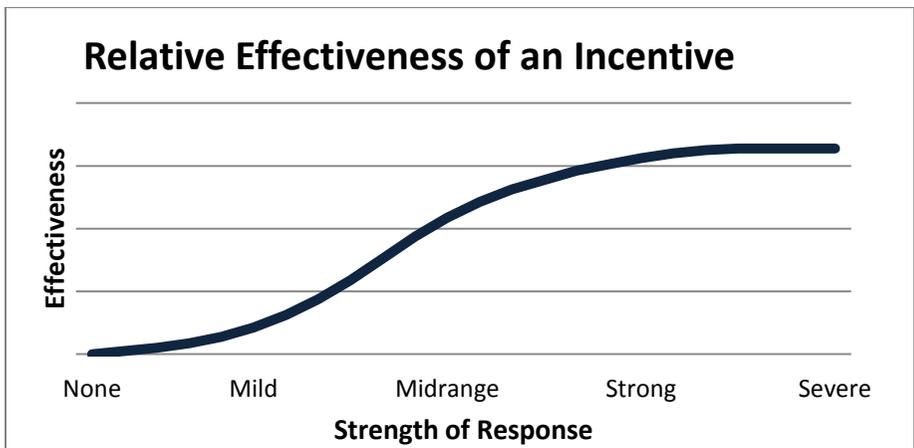
In summary, *any* response to behaviour, no matter how mild, if it in the least way makes the subject feel good (and motivated, or incentivised toward repeating...) or bad (and deterred, or incentivised from repeating...) the type of behaviour that invoked the response; *then that response is an incentive*.

This and what follows, is what most empirically supported behaviour management materials can be distilled down to.

I.1 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INCENTIVES

Whether the incentive is a *reward* or a *punishment*, in a very general sense, it is already known and proven that “*there is a direct relationship between the effectiveness of an incentive and the strength of the incentive*”. That relationship is provided graphically below.

Within *this* study, we can measure various classes of recidivism. Recidivism indicates the degree to which behaviours are repeated after experiencing a known negative consequence to it. Effectiveness relates inversely to recidivism: if recidivism is reduced by half, effectiveness has doubled, and thus we can measure the relative effectiveness.



Strength of Response: When there is no response (labelled “None”), the effectiveness in changing the behaviour is the lowest. Of course this makes sense because humans need feedback to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. *They cannot learn in a vacuum.*

As the strength of an incentive increases, attraction to a positive consequence and/or deterrence from experiencing a negative one increases. As such, recidivism generally decreases and the effectiveness increases. However, *with every incentive a point is reached whereby the increase in strength no longer produces correspondingly better effectiveness*, and often becomes counterproductive. This is another empirically proven fact that this study will address.

Factors complicating the “Strength of Response” Scale:

Here is where the range from no-response to severe becomes complicated. Certain types of responses can generally be regarded as a mild one (a short time out) or a strong one (a day in jail), but these labels are subjective. Further, there are two important aspects that can make the exact same response-type traverse the range on this scale.

First, the intensity with which a type of response is delivered can move it along the scale. For example: one may view a \$50 fine, such as a parking ticket, as mild; whereas a \$50,000 fine as strong. It's the same punishment type so the only variable that has changed is the *intensity* with which it is delivered.

As other examples: a one-day school suspension may be viewed as mild, but a full-term suspension as severe. So too in CP, an open-handed swat to the seat may be viewed as mild, whereas 12 strokes of the cane as severe. Therefore; we cannot categorically declare that any response type has a narrowly defined strength. This is also *intensity dependent*.

Second, there are, “*different strokes for different folks*” (this expression itself probably has its roots from CP usage in the past). Many former pupils recounted that they were denied SCP (usually because they were girls) and in lieu given in-school suspension (“ISS”) or some egregious imposition. These alternate punishments were likely viewed as “milder” or more lenient by the school. However, it created *resentment and hostility* in the pupil because s/he personally regarded the alternative as more severe; and that they were unjustly punished by being denied the option of CP as was available to others for the same offence. In fact, one case studied (2D Catford), had 47 canings issued specifically because the boys refused to attend a detention or perform an imposition. Since they knew what the only alternative was, they must have preferred it.

Thus, the above reflects another truth: *the severity of a punishment is very subjective to the person experiencing it*. The exact same punishment applied with the same intensity can be viewed as mild by one person while severe by another. Once again, no matter what the environment, *there is no “one size fits all” approach*. The data presented herein will speak to this aspect as well.

The Spectrum of Negative Incentives:

What follows are examples of negative incentives (punishments), and while not exhaustive, gives a clear list of these deterrents:

Monetary penalties: fines, paying restitution, replacing damaged or stolen items, and loss (or garnishments) of allowance / wages, seizure of assets or accounts, increased insurance premiums resulting from an offence, imposed court and legal costs...

Effort-based penalties: impositions (writing of lines/essays) or extra work, imposed community service, other restitutions - “*you broke it, you fix it*”, “*you made this mess, you clean it up*”, or “natural consequences”.

Suspension or removal of privileges: removal of food / denial of dessert, removal of use (TV, video game, cell phone, computer, car), withdrawal of extra-curricular activities, suspended from a team (group, work, office), suspended licenses, demerit points leading to suspensions, out-of-school suspension (“OSS”) & expulsions “exclusions” ...

Confinements or restriction of movement (these are a sub-category of psychological punishments): time-outs, confined to a room, groundings, detention, isolation booths, in-school-suspension (“ISS”), imprisonment.

Emotional and Psychological: admonishments, reprimands, scolding, sarcasm and humiliation, shunning, public shaming - printing the names of offenders in newspapers, informing persons of authority (parents, police), making (or writing letters of) apologies, forced to listen to victim impact statements...

Corporal Punishments: *Traditionally, this is narrowly defined as the intentional measured infliction of dermal pain to deter repetition of an act; such as spanking. However; broadly speaking, anything that uses some degree of physical discomfort to deter behaviours can be deemed CP. This includes methods such as: standing in a corner, maintaining any uncomfortable position, given extra laps to run, push-ups, etc. forced to wait to use the lavatory, made to feel cold, hot, wet, tired... Judicially, the police use of tasers, pepper spray and batons, and operations of restraining or handcuffing are all technically forms of CP. The ultimate form of CP is capital punishment: execution / death sentence.*

Negative Incentives and Society:

Societies function on the basis of rules. These rules exist to optimally balance the rights, freedoms and needs of all the stakeholders while at the same time attempting to prevent unduly infringing upon the rights, freedoms and needs of others. They promote the safe and efficient operation of society while balancing and minimizing various risks of harm and damage to oneself, others or society as a whole.

Why are we examining negative incentives in such detail? Some may never have considered this but today, *every society functions almost exclusively on a deterrence-based punitive system.*

For every rule, policy, by-law, law, regulation or criminal offence, there is an incentive to behave in a certain way. In each case, regardless of what the incentive is, it is invariably a *negative* one – a fine, sanction, consequence, penalty, punishment; all designed to deter the majority from transgressing such rules and in so doing, maintaining some degree of civil order and safe function of society.

The strength (and intensity) of the punishment is typically proportional to the generally accepted seriousness of the offence. The deterrence is regarded as proportional to its strength and intensity. If these are all considered ineffective, then why does society exclusively rely on them? The answer is that “effectiveness” comes about in two distinct ways:

First, relative effectiveness relates to the degree with which it stops the offender from reoffending: recidivism.

Second, relative effectiveness relates to the degree with which it deters others from engaging in the behaviour that would draw the known consequence for it. That deterrent value relates to the anticipation of the method’s strength and intensity without the need to experience it.

In either case, it is illogical to claim strong incentives are ineffective while claiming mild ones are more effective. Were there any truth to this, then societies would long ago have stopped sentencing murderers and rapists to lengthy prison terms and instead, sentence them to counselling and community service.

CP is a strong incentive. As it relates, it is equally illogical for anyone to make claims such as, “*spanking doesn’t work but time-outs do*”.

While this study is focused on measuring effectiveness by recidivism, it is important to recognise that the deterrent value of CP on the rest can have more value than on the person experiencing it. Countless historical recounts exist where an educator punished a child and opined,

“...whether or not it does the refractory child any good; it does have a noticeable and positive effect on the general level of school discipline”.

The same applies with lengthy prison terms. They are not imposed in the hopes of reforming the offender. They are imposed for the deterrent effect on the rest of society; and to fill society’s need for retribution and justice. Society feels, “justice was done”. When the media reports a conviction in a high profile horrific crime, all the “enlightened experts” are nowhere to be found. One *never* hears genuine concern for reforming the accused, only how severely they should be punished.

Further, strong incentives work because they can be resorted to rarely. In the example of spanking, once the child has experienced this, they should feel it is something to be strongly avoided. This assertion is empirically supported by results within. If a serious misbehaviour repeatedly continues after other methods have failed, a warning* can be issued that if it doesn’t stop; this is what will happen next.

That very frequently suffices without the actual need to use it. As such, the method is used best and is most effective when rarely resorted to. Hence, the effectiveness also comes from the inherent deterrent value, and not just the deployment value.

* However, if that warning is issued and compliance is not achieved, it is crucial to follow through so that the child takes warnings seriously. In this way, any punishment is also seen as “fair” since they knew they willfully disregarded the warning and knew exactly what the consequence would be. Used properly, when *any* punishment is issued, it should never be a “surprise”. The child must deliberately engage in behaviour they know is wrong, and that they are disregarding expectations of the known consequence for it.

I.2 HARM ASSOCIATED WITH INCENTIVES

The preceding is only one side of the relationship, so the picture is not yet complete. If it was, then the natural conclusion would be to apply the strongest response possible for any behaviour. Of course, intuitively we know this isn't optimal either. The reason follows:

Every incentive has certain risks of harm associated with it. Actually, ***there is no riskless approach to any incentive***, either positive or negative, or none. Those espousing only non-incentive methods invariably make this critical error. Using reason alone, choosing to ignore (blissful ignorance) or not respond to certain behaviours (permissiveness), and using obviously ineffective methods (willful blindness) all carry with them their own unique risks of harm.

There are actually ***two types*** of harm that come from any approach, and these harms are inversely related, or off-setting. (See chart opposite)

Direct Harm: The first and likely obvious type of harm that comes from using any incentive is the harm imparted on the recipient as a direct result of the incentive method employed. These harms can be physical, emotional and psychological and are often peculiar to a specific method.

In a general sense, the potential for direct harm is "nil" when no incentive is used but rises with the strength of the response. Direct harm can begin to rise exponentially once the incentive reaches a certain severity. Taken to its limit, direct harm from capital punishment is infinite. It's true that recidivism becomes nil because the offender cannot reoffend (since he is dead), but the harm imparted on him is absolute.

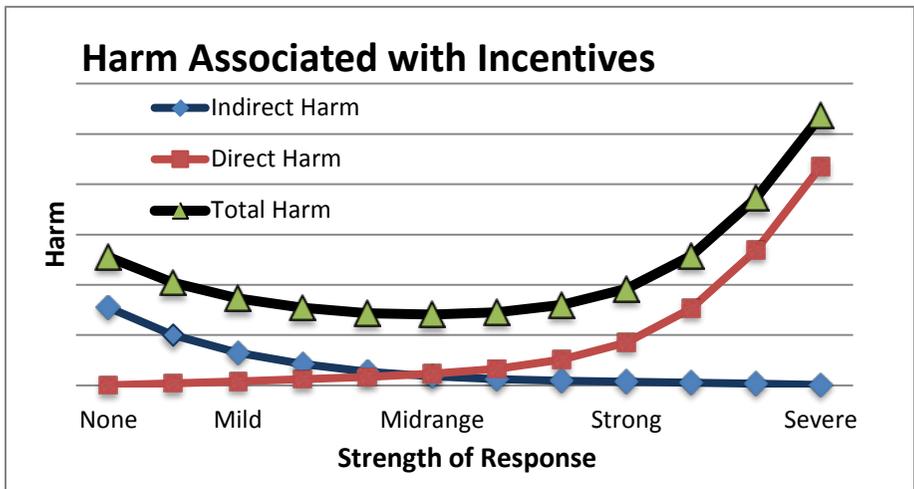
Indirect Harm: There is another real type of harm that is often not accounted for or intentionally ignored. That is the unintended harm that comes from not sufficiently altering behaviour, thus facilitating certain unacceptable behaviours to entrench. This ultimately causes greater long-term harm to the individual, and manifests as increased societal disorder resulting from those individual's entrenched anti-social behaviours. Proponents of ineffective or reason-only based systems are often guilty of distorting perceived harms of stronger methods, like CP, yet remain in denial that *all alternatives* proffered create harm.

Indirect harm is at a maximum when none or ineffective methods are used and declines as the effectiveness of behaviour modification incentives rise.

Total Harm: In order to find where the actual balance of harm lays, one needs to add both of these (direct and indirect) types of harm together.

Referring again to the chart below: doing nothing (no response) has some level of harm associated with it. Applying increasingly stronger incentives finds an optimum point somewhere. That is the point where the long-term harm to the individual is becoming mitigated because the strength of the incentive is sufficiently adjusting behaviour yet the method itself is not creating undue harm. Moving further along the scale, there is a point where direct harm resulting from the incentive begins to rise notably and this more than offsets the reduction in indirect harm. Thus, the total harm index begins to rise, and will continue to do so as stronger methods, or similar methods with increased severity (intensity), are employed. Note: *There is no point on the response scale that has zero harm associated with it.*

NB: As mentioned previously, what is perceived as "mild" by one person can be "severe" by another. That's why the gradient is shown but "mild", "midrange" or "strong" cannot be explicitly defined. This is a continuum unique to the individual experiencing it.



I.3 NET BENEFIT OF AN INCENTIVE

The net benefit of any response puts the two components together as it relates effectiveness of the method against the total harm it can cause. Net benefit takes the effectiveness of the incentive and subtracts the total harm caused at that strength of response level. (See chart below).

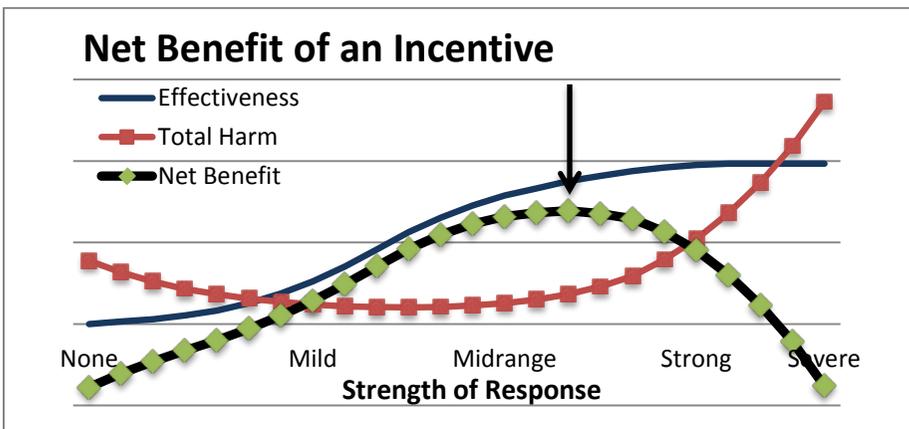
What we find is that “no response” is an unacceptable approach as it produces harm while providing no offsetting effectiveness.

There is a point where the incentive is strong enough to sufficiently modify behaviour and therefore; is effective. At the same level, the total harm imparted has not yet accelerated upward, and this gives an optimum strength of response for the incentive used for that individual. That is the maximum of the Net Benefit curve (arrow), and the optimal approach for that offender.

Moving further along on the strength of response scale, there comes a point where two negative events occur:

First, the increase in the effectiveness of the incentive begins to flatten, whereby additional severity no longer produces a meaningful increase in it. At some point, additional effectiveness stalls out entirely. Second, the harm curve begins to accelerate upward with ever-increasing slope.

These two factors combine to create a Net Benefit curve that turns downward and then accelerates quite rapidly.



How corporal punishment relates as an incentive:

This study will empirically show that where CP is an effective incentive, this is to varying degrees dependent on whom it is used, for what reason, how often, and at what intensity. These empirical findings will provide some valuable observations and resulting recommendations in this regard.

CP deployment can be problematic: When meted in an even-tempered and measured way, its net benefit can readily fit anywhere from “mild” to “strong” on the response continuum. However, used in anger, too fervently, or otherwise inappropriately or abusively, it can have the propensity to produce a net benefit more akin to “severe” on this curve. In short, in the latter there is an expectation of the result causing more harm than benefit, and in some cases substantially so. It is important to recognize: *that profile is not unique to CP* as it equally applies to *every* incentive improperly or too intensely applied.

Common Factors that Aggravate Anti-Social Behaviour:

An enormous amount of unrelated empirical research has convincingly confirmed that humans exposed to abject abuse, neglect, alcohol and substance abuse, economic hardship and chronic unemployment, family dysfunction, violence in media, school and sports, and other challenging environments are more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviours. Further, such behaviours may occur at higher frequency, to more serious degrees and these individuals often exhibit higher recidivism in their behaviours.

Despite this, the fundamental relationships proffered between incentives hold true regardless of the subject. That’s why *ultimate enforcement tools* work and why societies, despite all the ideological banter against them, continue to use them: imprisonment for society at large, exclusions at school and spanking at home.

Finally, individuals with serious mental disabilities and who are incapable of understanding or controlling their actions are not expected to exhibit the typical response to incentives or reason.

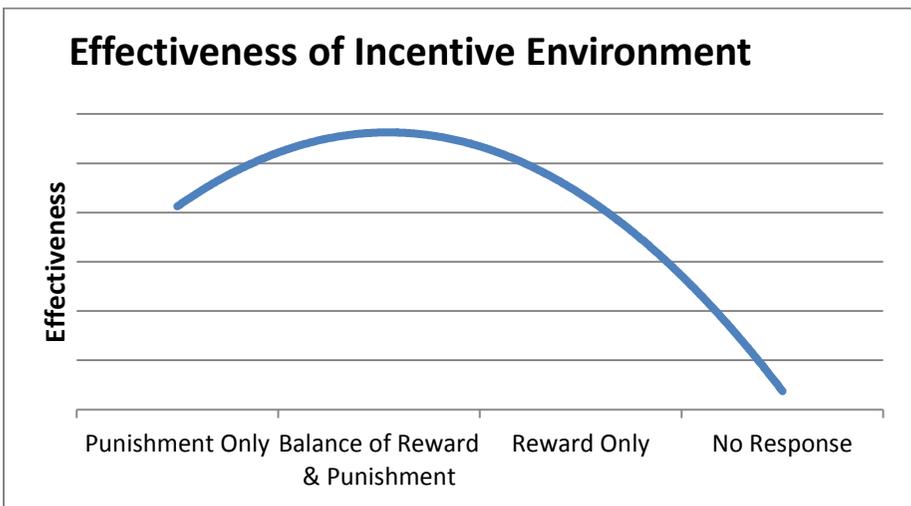
I.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF INCENTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

There is one piece of research worth presenting because it not only confirmed some of the aforementioned relationships, but adds one additional and highly important dimension to summarize incentives.

In 2003, Robert Marzano published research entitled, *“What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action”*⁸. This work included the results of a real-time study that investigated the effectiveness of the spectrum of incentive environments in actual school settings.

In summary, what he found was that there is value in using incentives, (chart below). An environment where punishment-only was used yielded a measureable result in promoting behaviour. Similarly, an environment (“progressive”) where reinforcement-only (reward) was used also similarly yielded a measureable result in promoting behaviour.

These contrasted sharply to an environment of “no immediate consequences” (deferring or ignoring response to the behaviour) and empirically confirms some of the presentation in *“The Effectiveness of Incentives”* (p.19).



He further demonstrated that the most effective environment was one where an equal balance of punishment and reward was used.

What this indicates is that either incentive type has real value but there must also be some limitation to the use of only one-sided incentives. In conclusion, combining both has some additive effect as it most optimally appeals to the broadest number of pupils.

From this, Marzano concludes that schools which embrace a “progressive” environment are empirically doing so to the detriment of student behaviour and school discipline. He summarized by stating,

“Clearly ... schools (should) strike a balance between rewards and punishments”.

NB: it is not clear what rewards or punishments were used, and to what frequency or intensity, however; it was stated that the punishment side of the study used only “mild” forms, and no corporal punishment.

Distributed By Permission, Source:

Hoff, H "Corporal Punishment: Is It Effective? An Empirical Study of School Punishment Records", 2014, Iron Gate Research, ISBN 149759748X,

Chapter 1 “A Perspective on Behaviour Modification”, pp.16-31

1.5 THE THREE BEHAVIOURAL PROFILES

When examining unacceptable behaviours and the use of punishments to modify them, it is instructive to separate people into three distinct groups. In doing so, the results of this study can empirically speak to each of them and provide some valuable insights.

We will consider the following three groups of people: (1) Compliant and deterred by foreknowledge of a consequence, (2) Deterred by experiencing a consequence, and finally, (3) Undeterred.

Behavioural Profile Groups explained:

1a. Compliant – This represents a small *minority* of the total. People in this group have an exceptionally well-developed moral compass that guides them appropriately. They are simply not predisposed to engage in unacceptable acts *regardless* of what, if any, consequence there may be for it. This group has been appealed to by reason alone, “*I would never steal from someone because I wouldn’t like it if they stole from me either*”.

1b. Compliant and deterred by foreknowledge of a consequence – This represents the largest portion of all. People in this group have a healthy moral compass but could be tempted to engage in unacceptable acts. It depends on what degree of consequence exists for it. What prevents them from doing so is that the anticipated consequence is too costly, making the gain not worth the risk. This group is thereby effectively deterred by the known consequence to that action. This is how society primarily functions. 1a & 1b form the **Compliant Group 1**.

2. Deterred by experiencing a consequence – This group, while being aware of the likely consequence of their action, remain undeterred until they have experienced such consequence on one or a few occasions*. If the consequence is sufficiently unpleasant, then they learn that negative actions have consequences and are effectively deterred from repeating them. This is a valuable component of effectiveness that progressive (reward-only) systems, by definition, cannot offer.

* For the purpose of this study, group-2 is defined as those who, in their environment, received corporal punishment *three times or less*.

3. Undeterred by experience – This group is the smallest of the total. Regardless of being aware of the consequences and repeatedly experiencing such consequences, they simply do not care and continue to engage in the acts that draw the punishment.

This group illustrates one shortcoming of *all* punishments. It is most likely that they have become used to, or desensitized by, the punishment repeatedly experienced. For this group; it requires the strength and/or intensity of the method to be increased to make the consequence increasingly unpleasant. As has been outlined herein, the danger to that approach is that such increases have a propensity to escalate unintended harm while not producing added benefit. This study will examine this assertion empirically.

Punishments, and the deterrent value they bring, *find their maximum benefits in Group 1b and Group 2 individuals*, which together represent the vast majority of the total. Insofar as school corporal punishment is concerned (and this applies to any other strong sanction), one can see how these groups relate to something I have often opined as follows:

There are children on either end of this scale: those who would equally respond to milder methods, and there are those who, no matter how many canings, simply do not care and will not respond to this method.

At either end, the method is likely to cause more unintended harm than good. It appears it works best for those in the middle, who while not responding adequately to milder measures; do respond well to this – the one to three time offenders who were deterred from becoming serial-offenders. But, if any strong method has been tried and failed on several occasions, it seriously should be dropped in favour of other techniques.

The results of this study speak to all these issues and provide empirical support for the opinion offered in the above comment.

The data easily breaks out groups 2 and 3, and readily shows the figures for a **combined** compliant group 1. It cannot break out groups 1a and 1b individually in absolute terms, but in some cases it will in relative terms, such as junior children vs. senior youths.