



Disciplining Children: Parental Concerns and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The process of socialization in family starts with disciplining the child at an early age. Discipline is often associated with nouns like control, regulation, order, authority, restriction, punishment, and verbs like train, drill, teach, coach, educate, indoctrinate. Oxford dictionary defines discipline as “the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of a behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience”. The definition entails disciplinary practices are aimed at undesirable behavior. Disciplinary practices can be categorized under power assertion and induction disciplinary practices. Corporal punishment, which is the dominant aspect of power assertion, includes slapping, spanking and paddling (UNICEF, 2014) are used as corrective means to control the maladaptive patterns of behavior of the child. The disciplinary practices in Asia predominantly make use of corporal punishment, but it has been proved different by studies done on Vietnamese mothers and mother from Singapore who were found to be using more of reasoning (induction) as corrective measures (Papps et al., 1995; Lee et al., 2004). Very few Indian studies have been there reflecting clear disciplinary practices employed by the parents with no significant differences in mothers’ and fathers’ disciplinary practices (Dhanya & Sukumaran, 2013).

The current study hence, is an attempt to understand the parental concerns and the strategies adopted to discipline their children. From among 55 volunteers, 43 parents (either father or mother) were selected following an inclusion-exclusion criteria. Out of the 43 parents, 19 fathers with an average age of 47.42 years and 24 mothers with an average age of 38.73 years completed an ‘online survey on disciplinary practices’. Among other causes, the five most prevalent causes of concern for parents are, when children do not eat healthy food and indulge in eating junk/fast food (16.03%), do not maintain cleanliness of the house and personal rooms (15.09%), when they spend too much time on mobile phones and computers watching obscene videos and playing games (12.26%), when they answer back and argue (11.32%), and when they do not show the gesture of respect to elders as trained (9.43). The three most frequently used strategies by the parents are discussing the matter and telling them not to repeat the same mistake with justifications (67.44%), avoiding talking to them for some time (11.62%), finally the most interesting is that, they adopt other methods which they do not want to disclose (6.97%). Next, parents were given 13 different situations where they were asked to choose a particular option of disciplining their children. The situations include greeting someone, following instructions, night stay at friend’s place, study regime, excessive TV watching, interrupting adult’s conversations even after repeated warnings, watching obscene videos in mobile phone and insisting on driving despite being underage etc. The responses however, are having high social desirability effect. Next, most parents did not answer about the methods of disciplining their children. Parental interviews revealed that they are pressurized to prove that they are good parents and are raising highly disciplined kids, so that the society would respect them.

Key Words: Child, Discipline, Parenting, Behavior

DISCIPLINE and DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Discipline

The tendency to inculcate certain rules and conduct which is acceptable as per societal norms to the people and if they don't behave in a socially desirable pattern which would in turn hamper their normal functioning, punishment is a mode for correcting these undesirable patterns of behavior (Collin's Dictionary, 2018).

Disciplinary practices are indispensable in helping children adhere to the norms of the cultural set up to which they belong.

INTRODUCTION

Socialization process of a child normally starts in the family and parents are the key drivers of this process based transformation. One of the major goals of socialization is disciplining the child. At the very basic level, the child is expected to behave in a socially and culturally approved way. Any form of deviation from the widely accepted socio-cultural norms is considered as an indisciplined behavior. A child may display indisciplined behavior in the presence or absence of others. While understanding and controlling indisciplined behavior in the absence of others, it is all the more important to understand and control such behavior when others are present. As parents are the primary observers and stakeholders in the process, they are also the first to initiate the disciplinary process for the child. Whether, their concerns are genuine or not and their strategies to discipline the children are correct or not, there is no consensus of opinion. Corporal punishment, which is the dominant aspect of power assertion, includes slapping, spanking and paddling (Lansford & Deater-Deckard, 2012; Runyan et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2014) are used as corrective means to control the maladaptive patterns of behavior of the child. The disciplinary practices in Asia predominantly make use of corporal punishment, but it has been proved different by studies done on Vietnamese mothers and mothers from Singapore who were found to be using more of reasoning (induction) as corrective measures (Papps et al., 1995; Lee et al., 2004). India being a country of multiplicities of language, religion, culture etc., it becomes an interesting region of interest for social science researchers. The practice of discipline vary from place to place. Very few Indian studies have been there reflecting clear disciplinary practices employed by the parents with no significant differences in mothers' and fathers' disciplinary practices (Dhanya & Sukumaran, 2013). Rural Indian Mothers have used severe verbal and physical discipline (Hunter et al., 2000). Traditionally, Indian parents resort to more stricter forms of disciplining their children through spanking and some other milder forms of corporal punishment. But, with changing times and imposition of child-rights laws, this practice is going through a change, from corporal punishment to making the child understand why it is not acceptable to be indisciplined. Nevertheless, corporal punishment and shaming still exist in the Indian families when it comes to disciplining the child. We are trying to explore the parental concerns and strategies of disciplining their children in the pilot-study.

OBJECTIVES

The current study aims to explore:

- i) The behavior parents perceive to be an indisciplined behavior and want to change them and**
- ii) The strategies/means they adopt to discipline their child.**

METHOD

Participants

Initial Sample Size=55

Final Sample Size following Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria=43

Inclusion Criteria: Must be Fathers or Mothers of the Child

Exclusion Criteria:

- i) Married couple having no children
- ii) Any other way related to children
- iii) Outsiders working with children
- iv) Those who do not disclose the relationship with the child

Measures

Based on the review and discussions with peers, a semi-structured survey questionnaire on “PARENTAL CONCERNS AND STRATEGIES” to discipline children was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire includes socio-demographic variables like sex, age, education, occupation etc., areas of concern(where to discipline) for parents, strategies they adopt to discipline and 13 situations with choices of disciplinary practices adopted by parents. For ease of data collection a Google Form was created for the survey, the link of which was later sent to the selected parents.

Average age of participants-42.86

Number of Fathers -19

Average Age of Fathers- 47.42

Number of Mothers -24

Average Age of Mothers-38.73

Joint Family Structure-12

Nuclear family Structure-31

Residing in Metropolitan Cities-15

Residing in Small Cities-25

Residing in Villages-3

Respondents from Odisha State-37

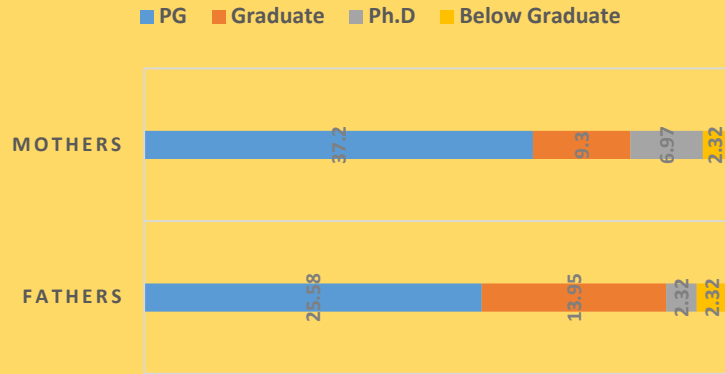
Respondents from States other than Odisha-6

Procedure

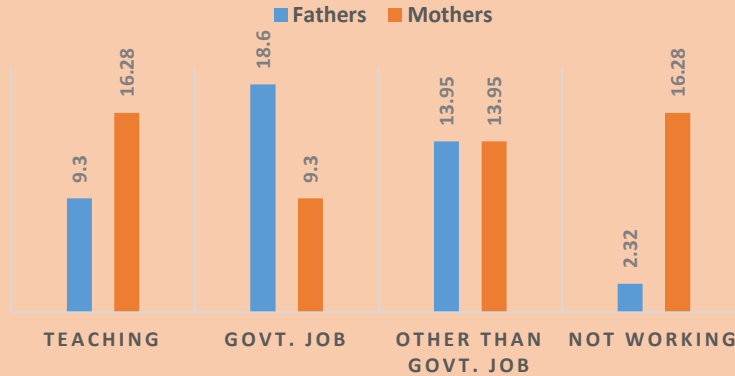
An invitation to participate in a survey was floated using various social networking groups like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp etc. for about two-weeks. After two-weeks, the number of willingness to participate reached up to 55. Based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria 43 parents were selected for the final survey. Semi-structured survey questionnaire on “PARENTAL CONCERNS AND STRATEGIES” to discipline children link was sent to 43 parents with a request to send the filled-in survey within a period of 30 days. After 15 days a reminder was also sent to the participants.

RESULTS (Socio-Demographic)

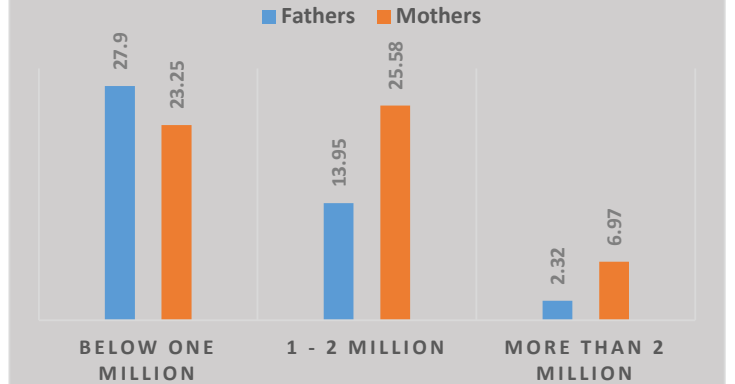
EDUCATION



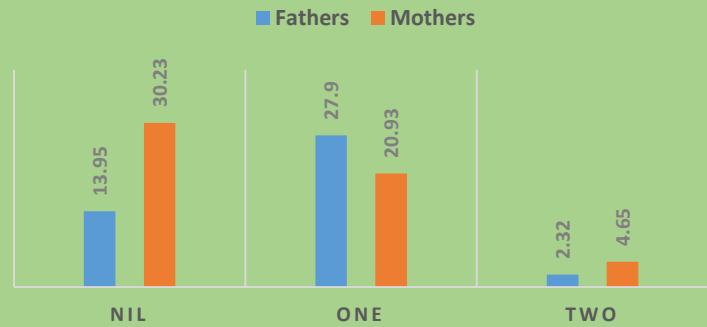
OCCUPATION



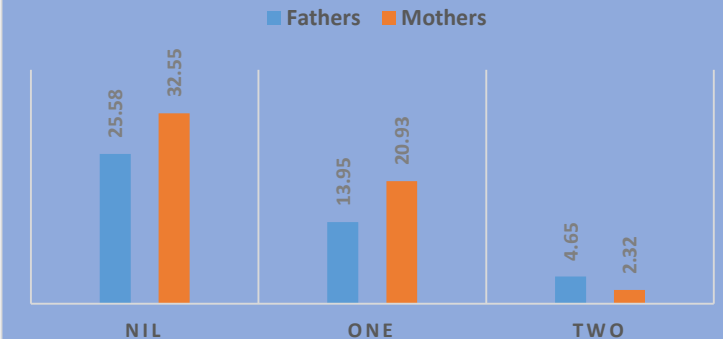
ANNUAL INCOME



NO. OF GIRL CHILD BELOW 18 YEARS



NO. OF BOY CHILD BELOW 18 YEARS



Areas of Concern for Discipline

What are the behaviors that you consider as misconduct if your child does and want them to change?

Your child does not eat healthy food and indulges in junk/fast food

Your child does not show the gesture of respect to the elders as you trained them

Your child wants to play indoor or outdoor games when you want them to study and not waste time

Your child answers back and tries to put his/her argument when you are instructing him/her

Your child is not performing according to your expectations and you think it's because he/she hasn't put in enough efforts

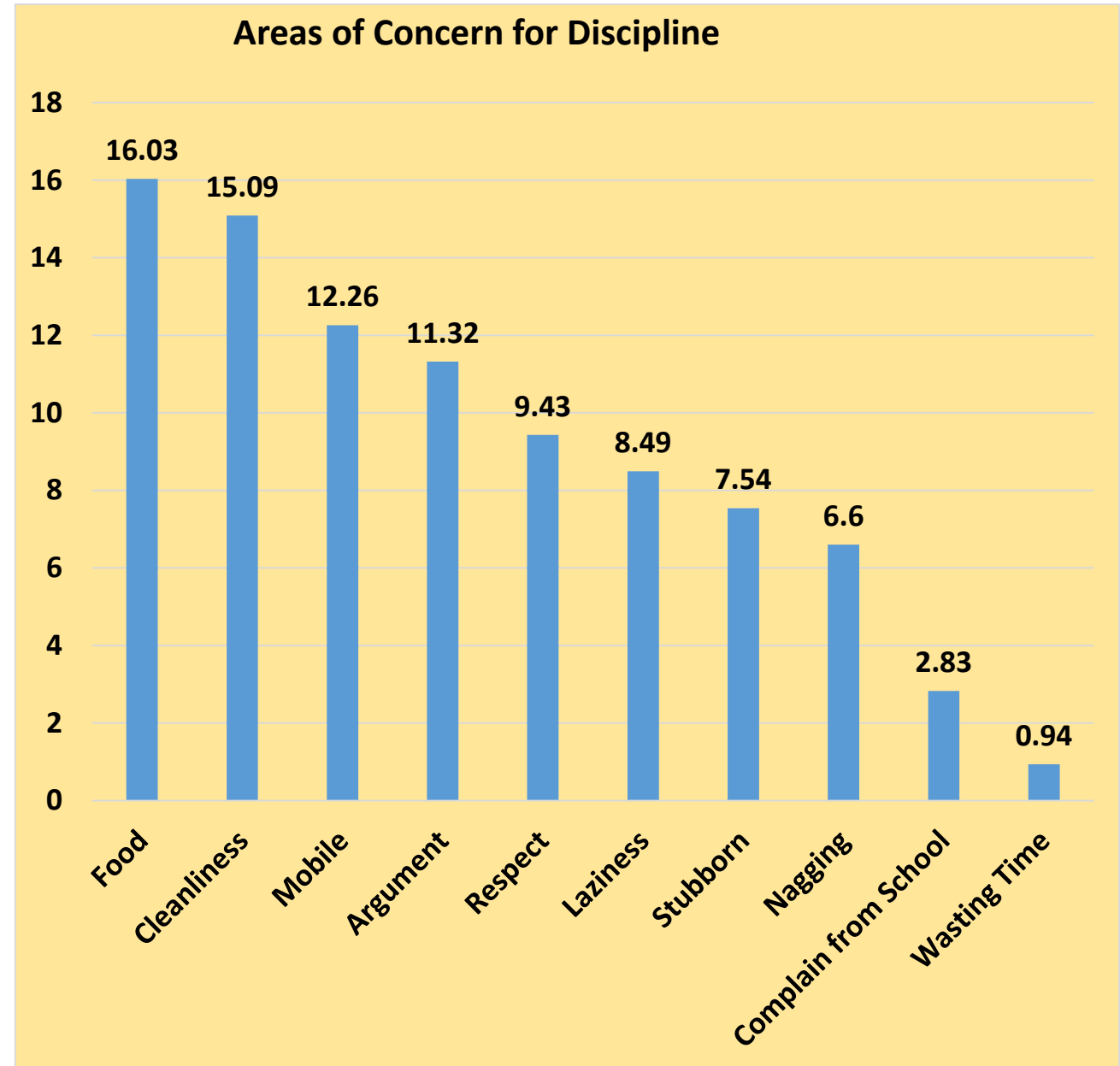
You get a complaint from school regarding the improper conduct of the child

Your child spends too much time on the mobile phone and computers watching obscene videos and playing games

Does not maintain cleanliness of the house and personal room

Consistently nags about getting a particular thing that s/he wants.

Your child is stubborn and does not do a particular task even after repeated reminders



Strategies to Discipline Children

What strategies you think are best among these to discipline a child?

Assigning them with extra household chores as a punishment

Avoiding talking with him/her for some time

Criticizing him/her in front of relatives or their friends so that they will feel bad and not repeat the same mistake

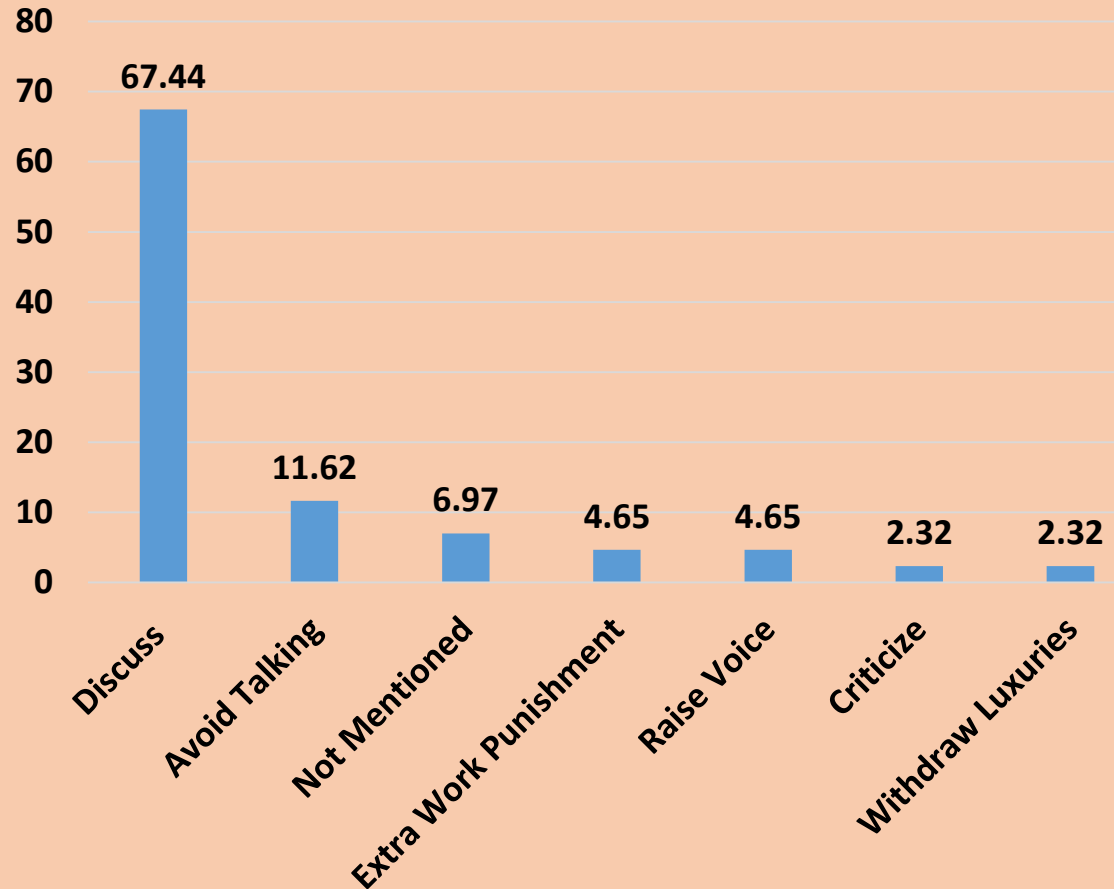
Discussing the matter with them and telling them not to repeat the same mistake with justifications

Instructing him/her in loud and harsh voice about not doing a particular task

Withdrawing certain luxuries

Other Methods

Strategies to Discipline Children



Situation 1: If a relative has visited your place and your child does not greet them as you have trained him/her

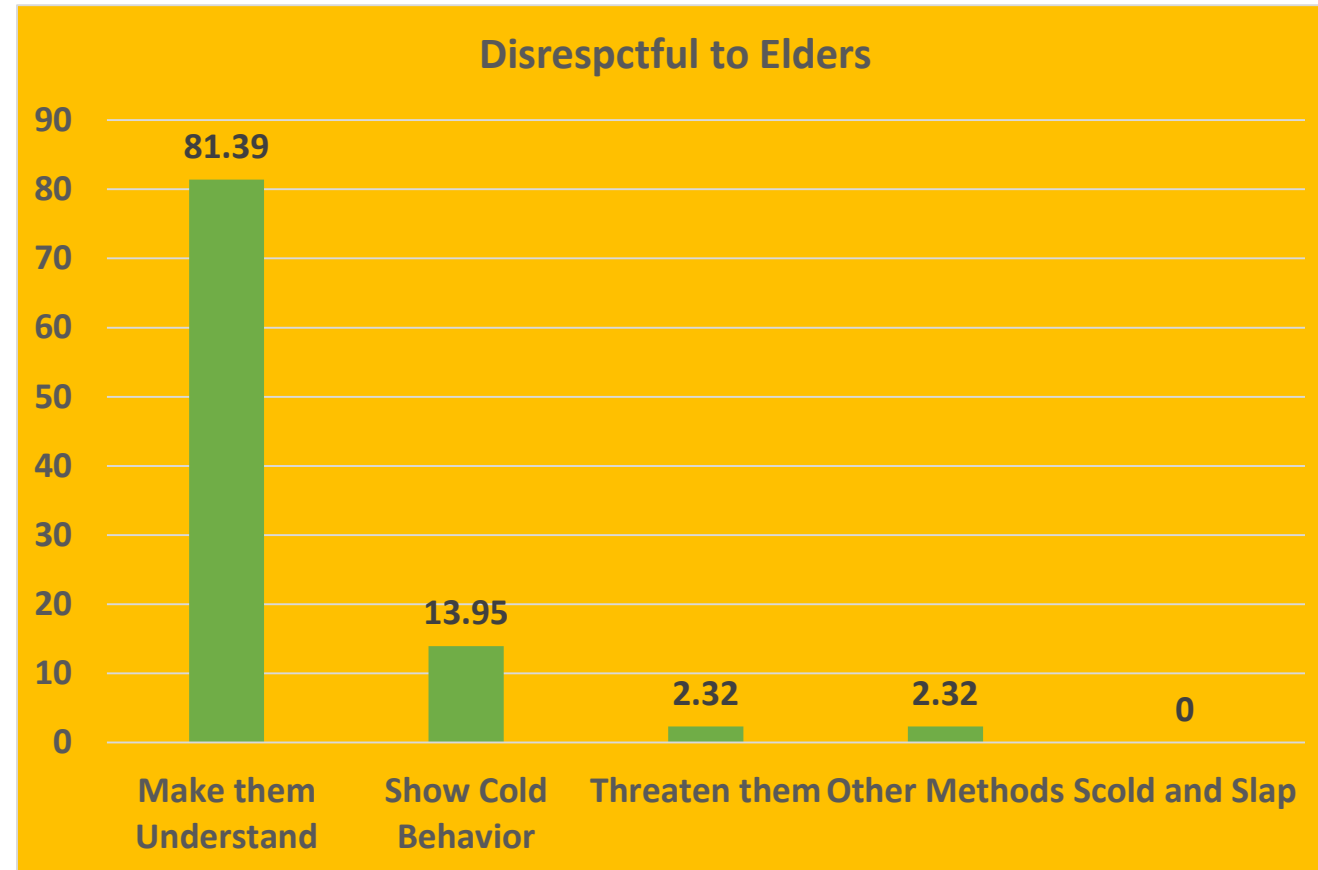
Scold them in front of the guests and slap them.

Make them understand after the guests leave

Threaten them and refrain from giving things they wanted

Show similar cold behavior in front of their friends so that they understand

Other Methods



Situation 2: If your child does not follow your instructions

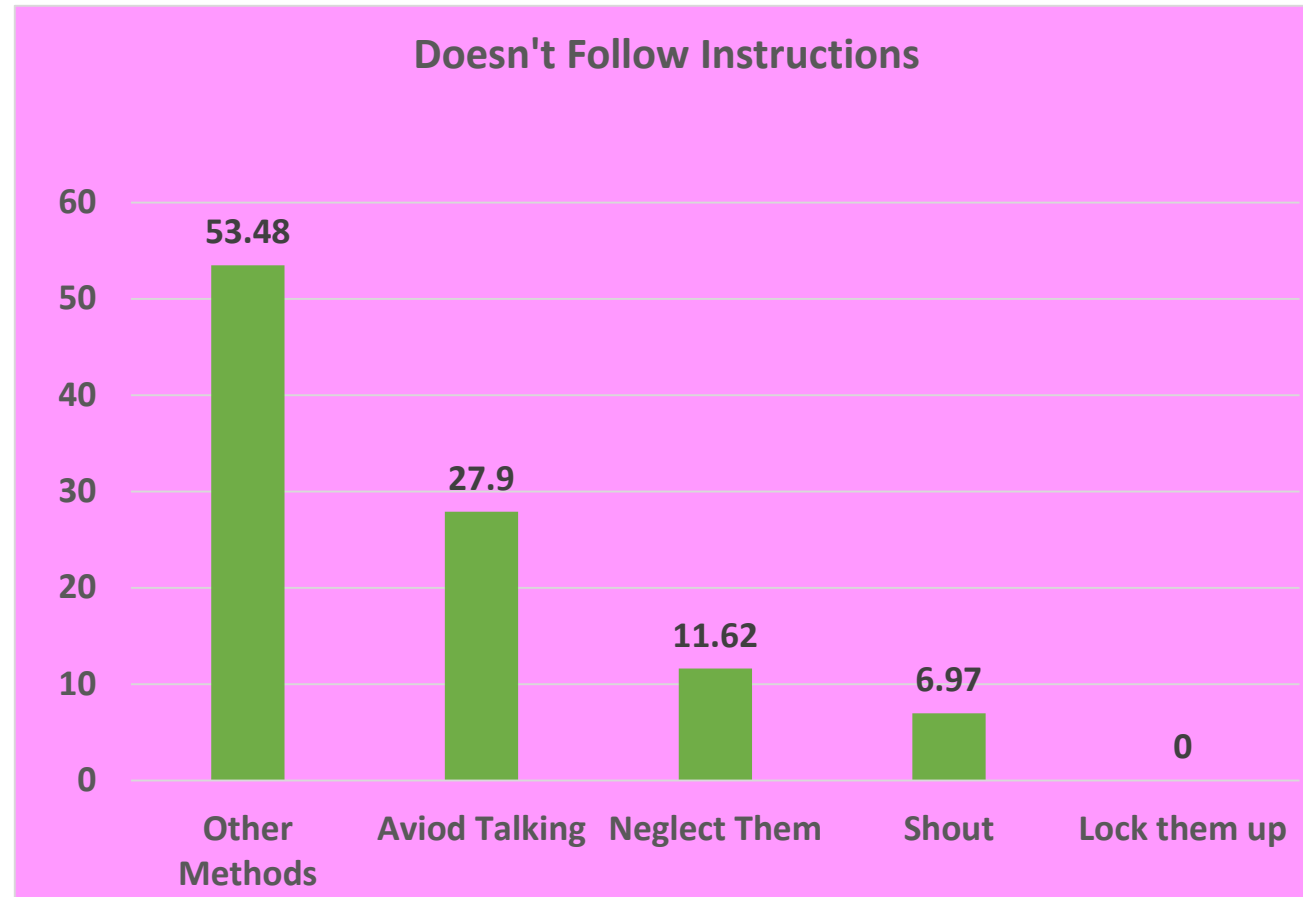
Avoiding talking to them

Shouting at them

Neglect them by not fulfilling their demands

Locking them up

Other Methods



Situation 3: You have restricted your child who is the age range of 10-15 to have a night stay at his/her friend's residence. Despite your restriction the child is persistent in his demand to have a stay over

Let him/her stay with a warning that if any wrong happens, has to be handled by him/her without your support

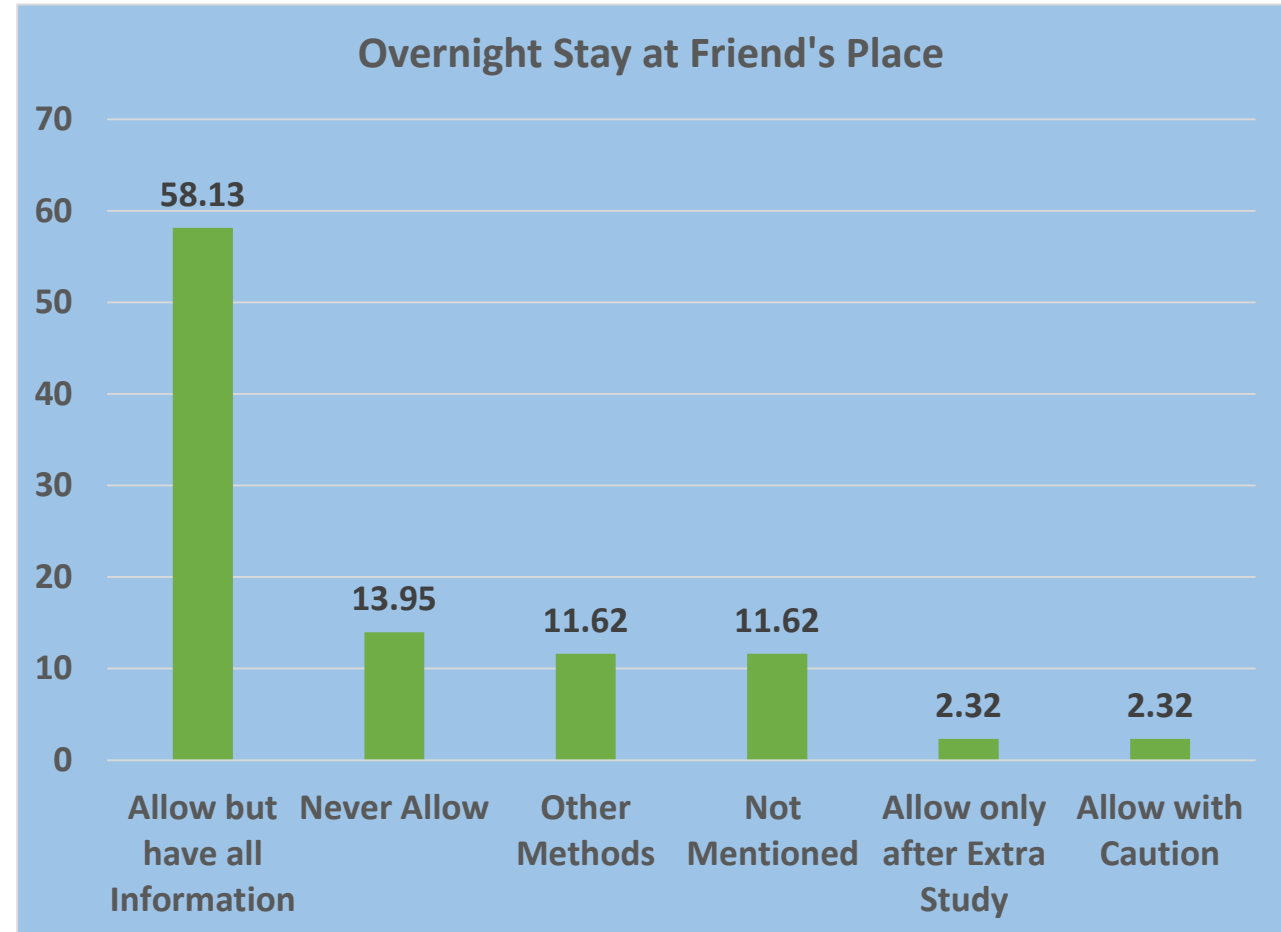
Never allow him/her no matter whatever the consequences are

Allow the child to have a stay back but make sure that the friend is well- known to you and you have all the details of the friend.

Ask him/her to study over time if s/he has to stay back at friend's place.

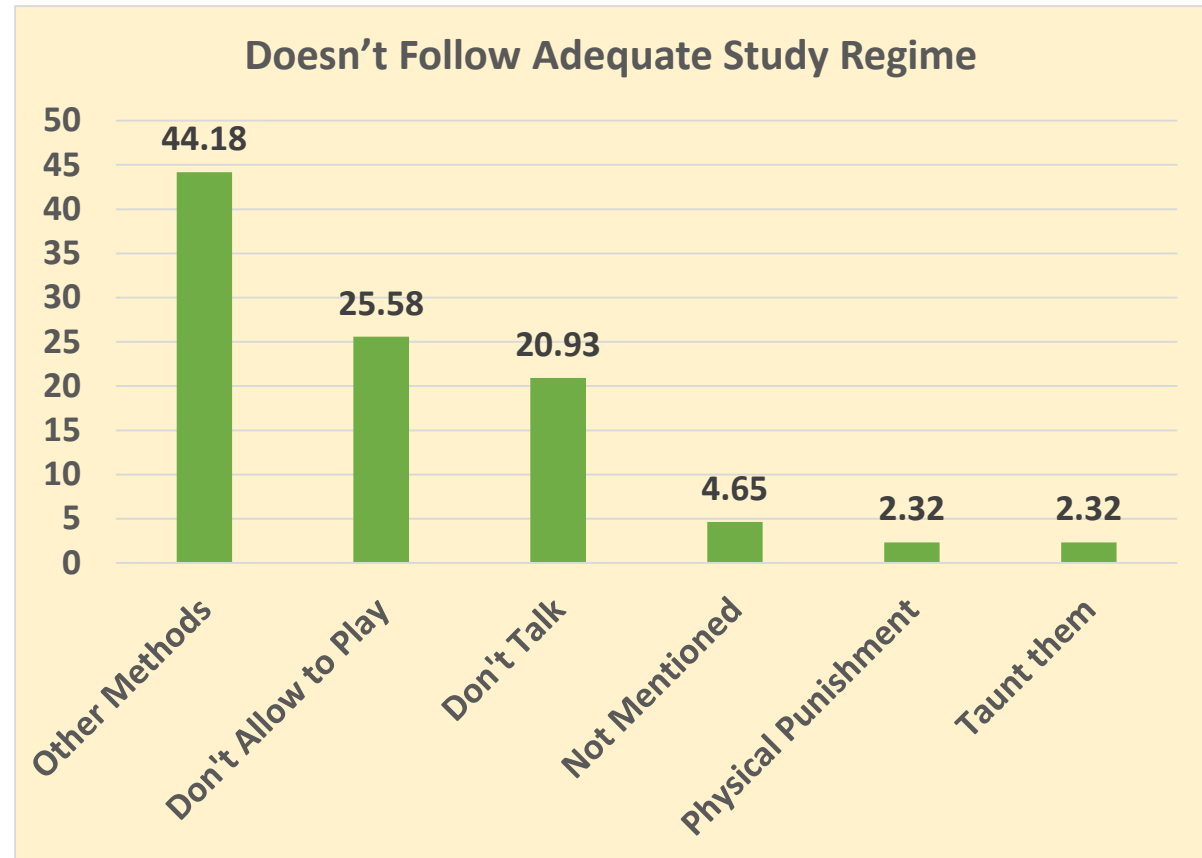
Other Methods

Not Mentioned



Situation 4: If your child does not follow adequate study regime

Taunting them in front of their friends and relatives	
Hitting them with rod/ruler/belt	
Refraining them from going to play outdoors or even computer games	
Not talk to them for sometime	
Others Methods	
Not Mentioned	



Situation5: You restrict your child to view television in the evening hours. After repeated reminders s/he indulges in the same behavior

Hit him/her every single time you find them watching television

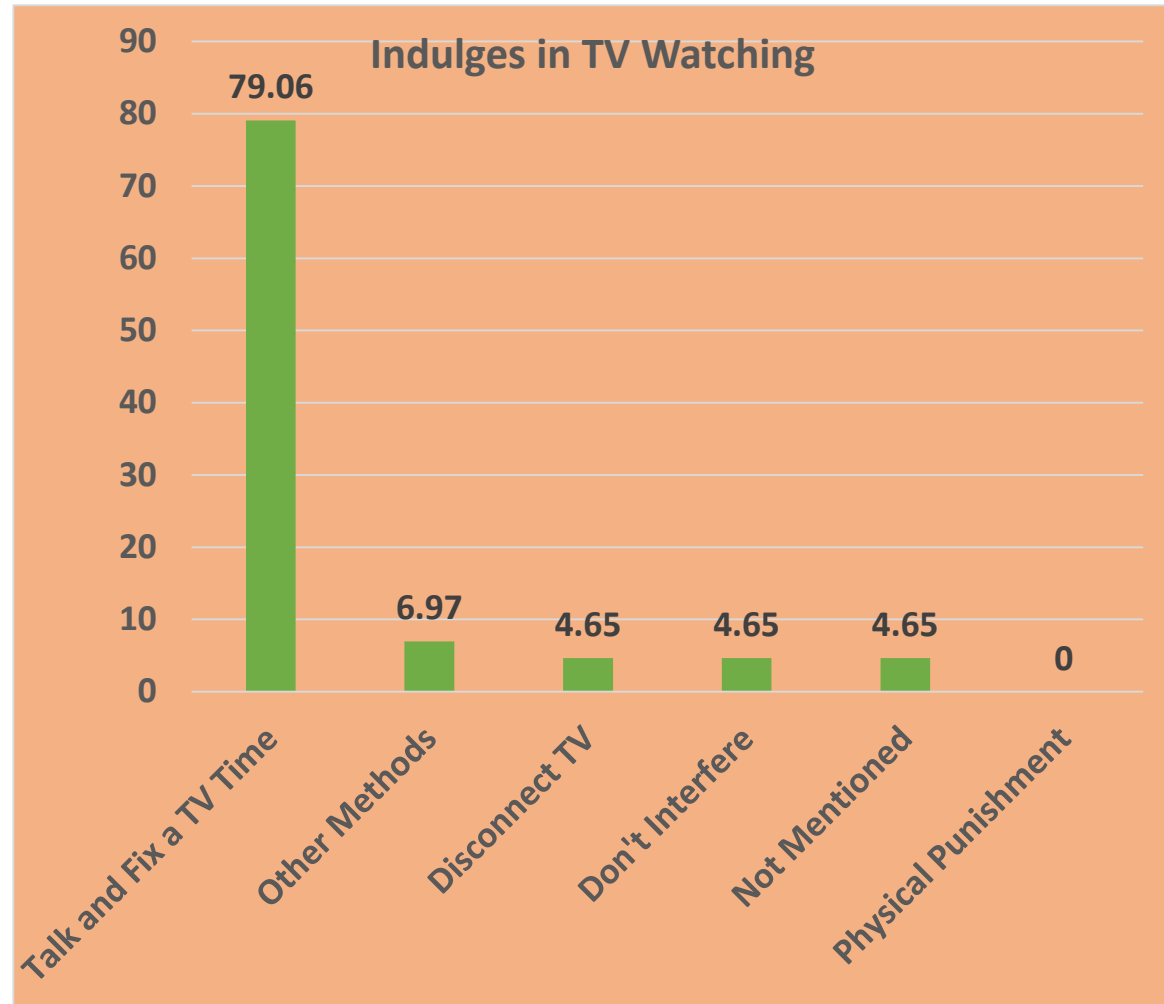
Disconnect the connection so that s/he is not able to view at any point of time

Talk to them and decide fixed duration for them where they can watch television

Decide not to tell them anything as you believe they will automatically restrict themselves when they realize

Others Methods

Not Mentioned



Situation 6: Your child is in the age range of 2-5 years and has a habit of disorganizing/shuffling the cutlery items or decorative pieces at home

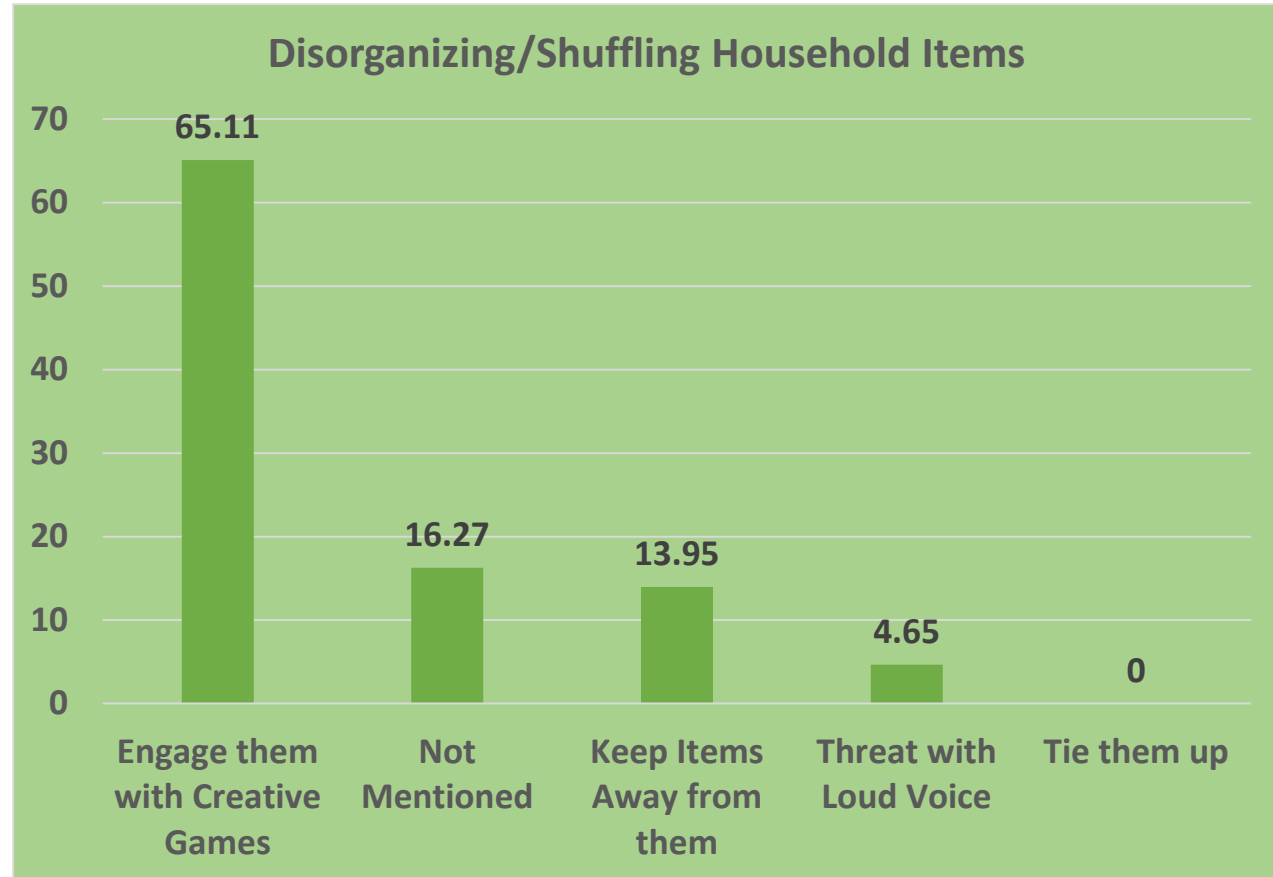
Keep these things out of their reach

Threaten them in loud voice not to touch

Tie them up in a bed so that they are not able to move when you are working

Engage them with toys and creative games

Not Mentioned



Situation 7: Suppose your child hasn't eaten the food that was prepared at home and has ordered a pizza

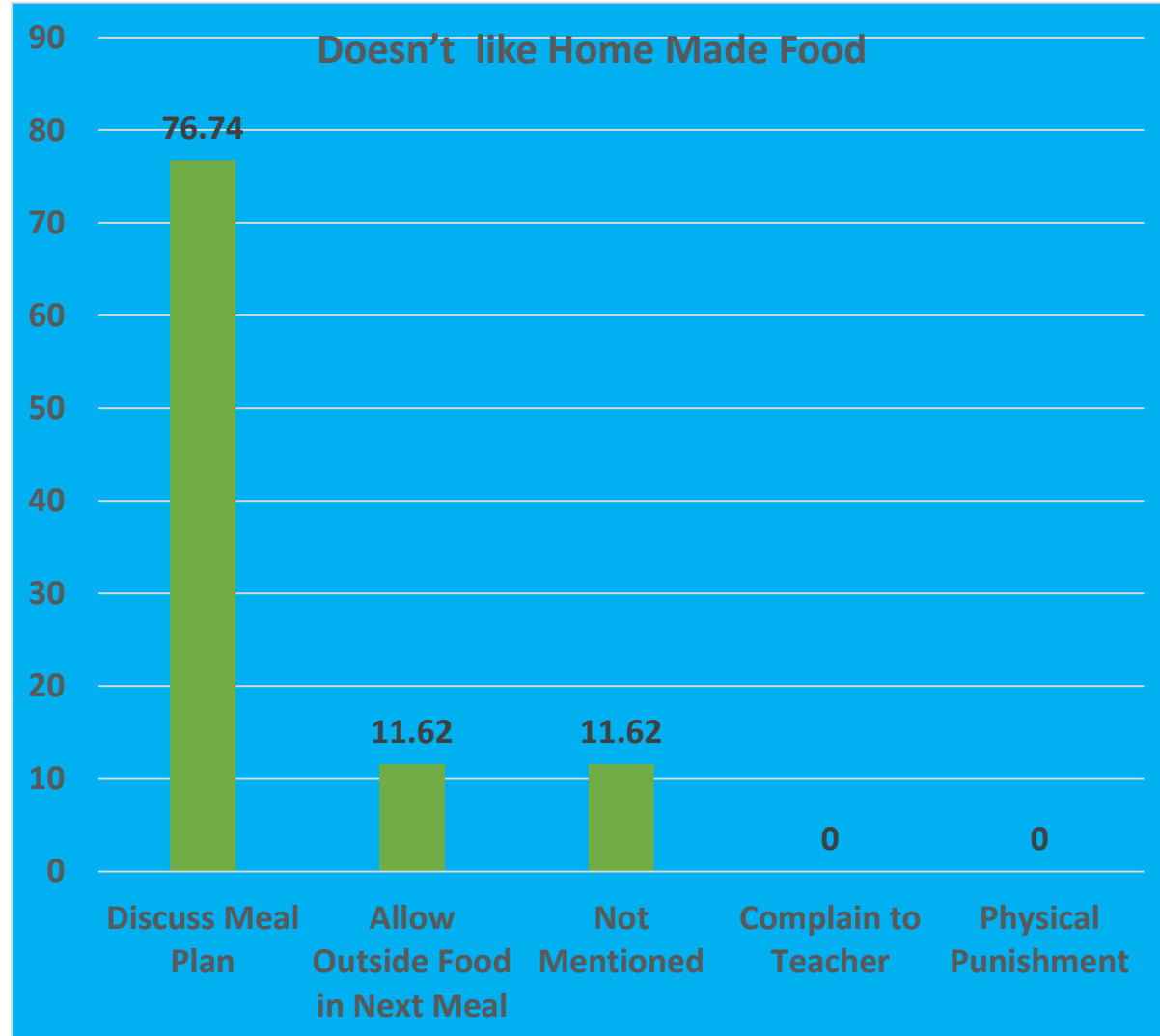
Ask him/her to eat the same food for the next meal

Slap and hit him/her

Discuss a meal plan and allow one cheat day when he/she will be allowed to eat junk food once in a week/fortnight

Complain in front of the teacher so that, he is humiliated

Not Mentioned



Situation 8: You had been to the parents' teacher meeting and the teacher complained that your child is being inattentive in the class

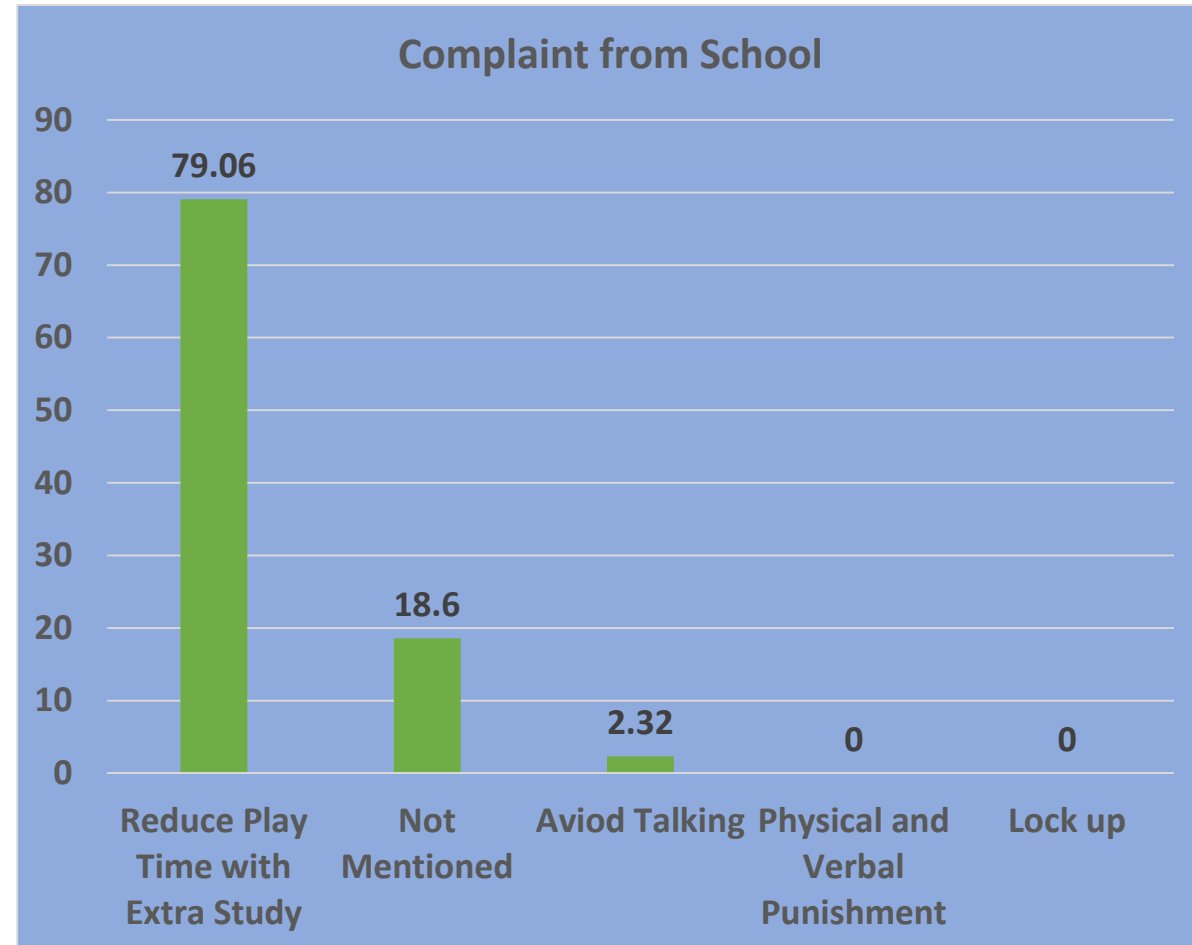
Scold and slap him in front of the teacher

Avoid talking to him

Give him/her extra to study and reduce the play time

Lock him/her up in a room and not allow to go out

Not Mentioned



Situation 9: Your child is in the age range of 5-10 years and has a habit of interrupting between the conversations of adults. You find the child does not pay heed even after repeated reminders.

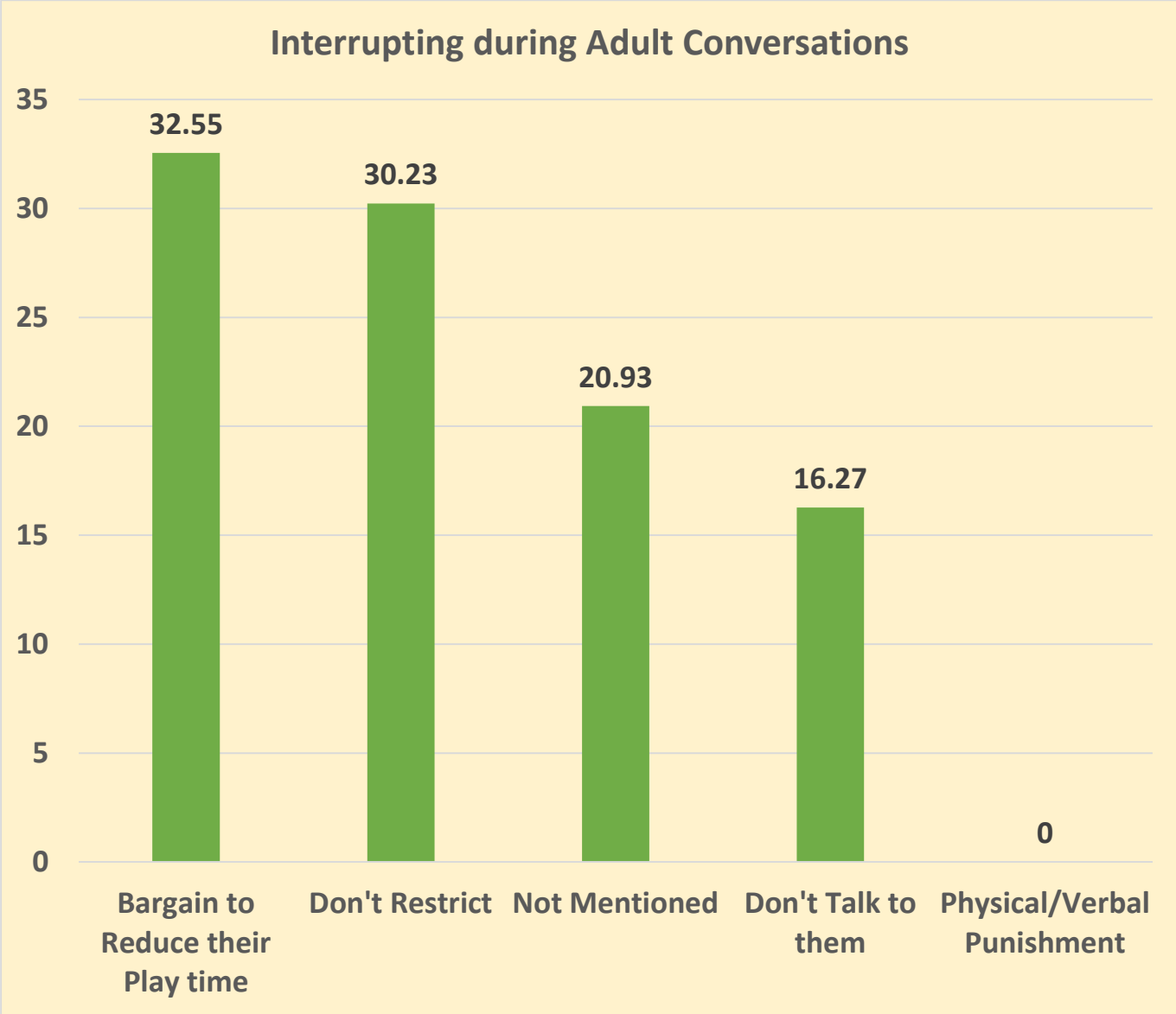
Not restrict him/her as you feel the child might develop a sense of resentment towards you

Scold/ Slap the child in front of everyone, so that s/he feels humiliated and will not repeat that again

Not talk to him/her whenever they show this particular behavior

Bargain with them, that whenever they show this behavior, their playtime will be deducted

Not Mentioned



Situation 10: You find your child viewing obscene videos in the mobile phone

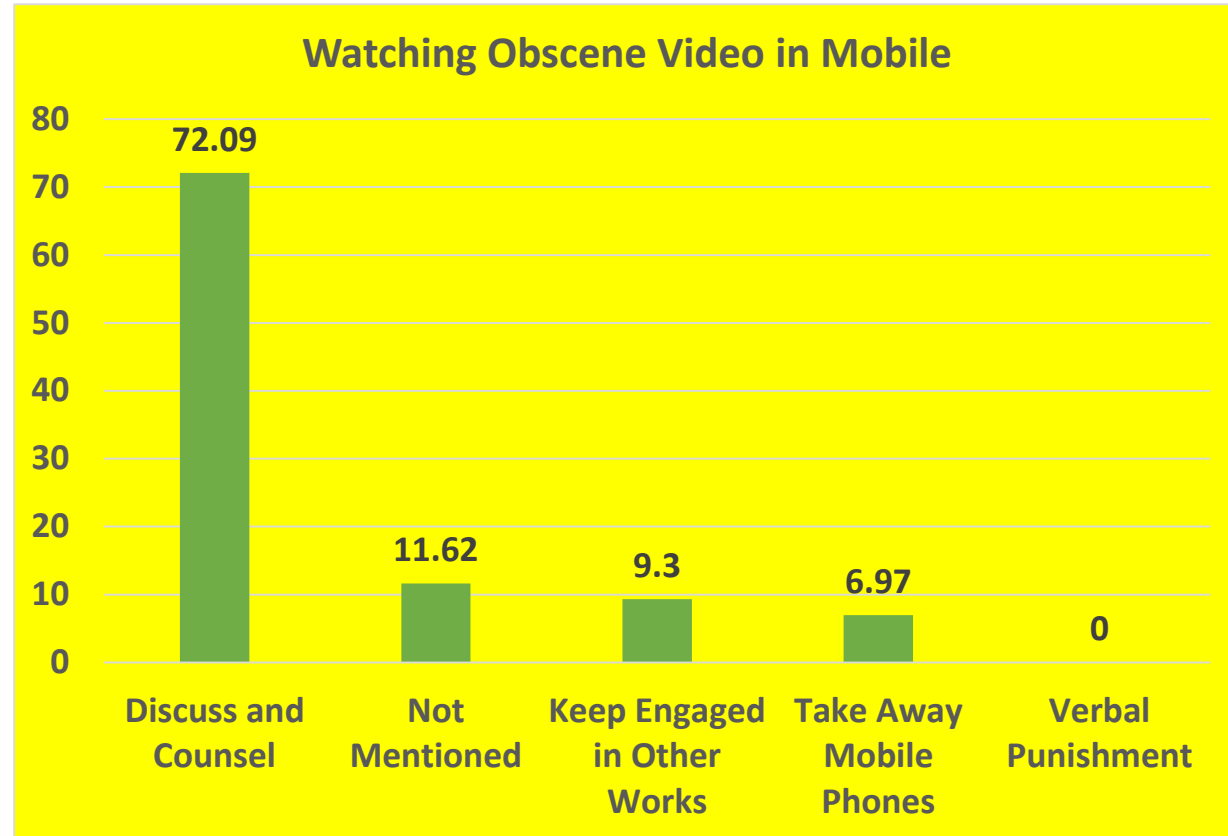
Get very angry, shout and hit him/her

Take away the mobile phone and not give him/her back

Talk with him/her about the pros and cons and the right age

Engage him/her so much that he/she is tired and devoid of leisure time

Not Mentioned



Situation 11: You find your child does not keep his/her room clean after repeated reminders

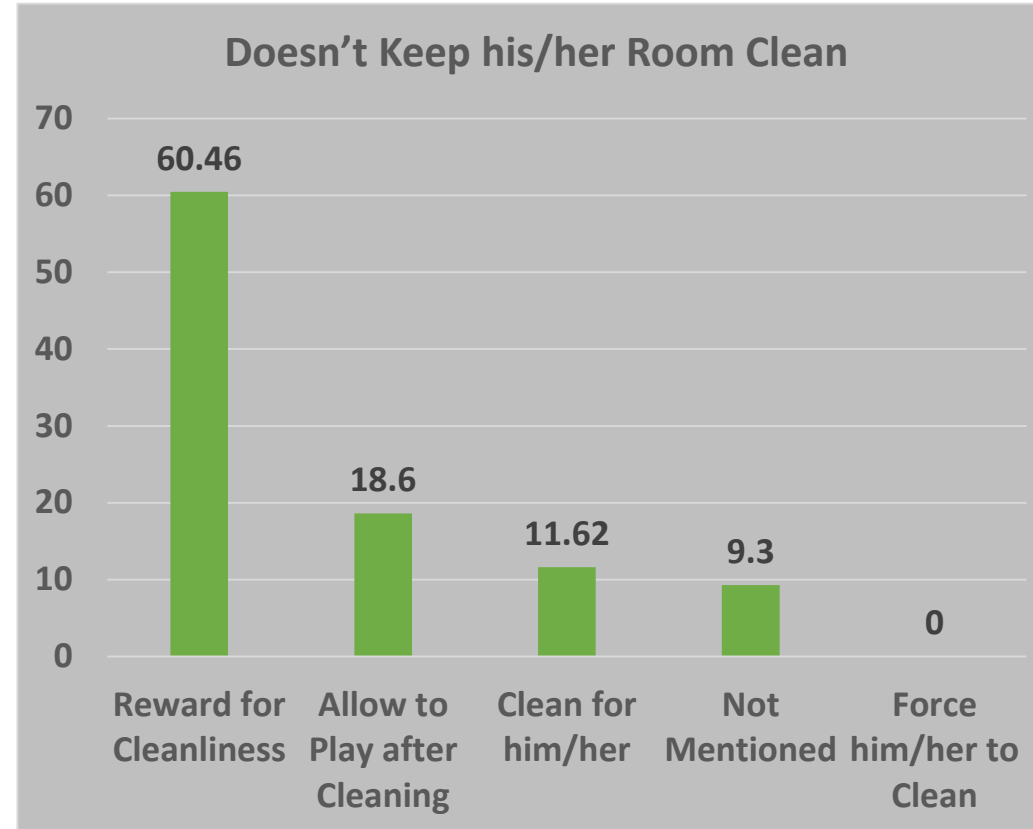
Stop saying him/her anything and clean the room yourself

Stop him/her from engaging in leisure time and instead ask him/her to clean the room and tell that he/she would be allowed to play only after he/she cleans the room

Shout at him and force him to clean the room right then

Tell him/her that he/she would get a reward weekly if he/she keeps the room clean

Not Mentioned



Situation 12: You are trying to say something and your child argues back which you didn't like

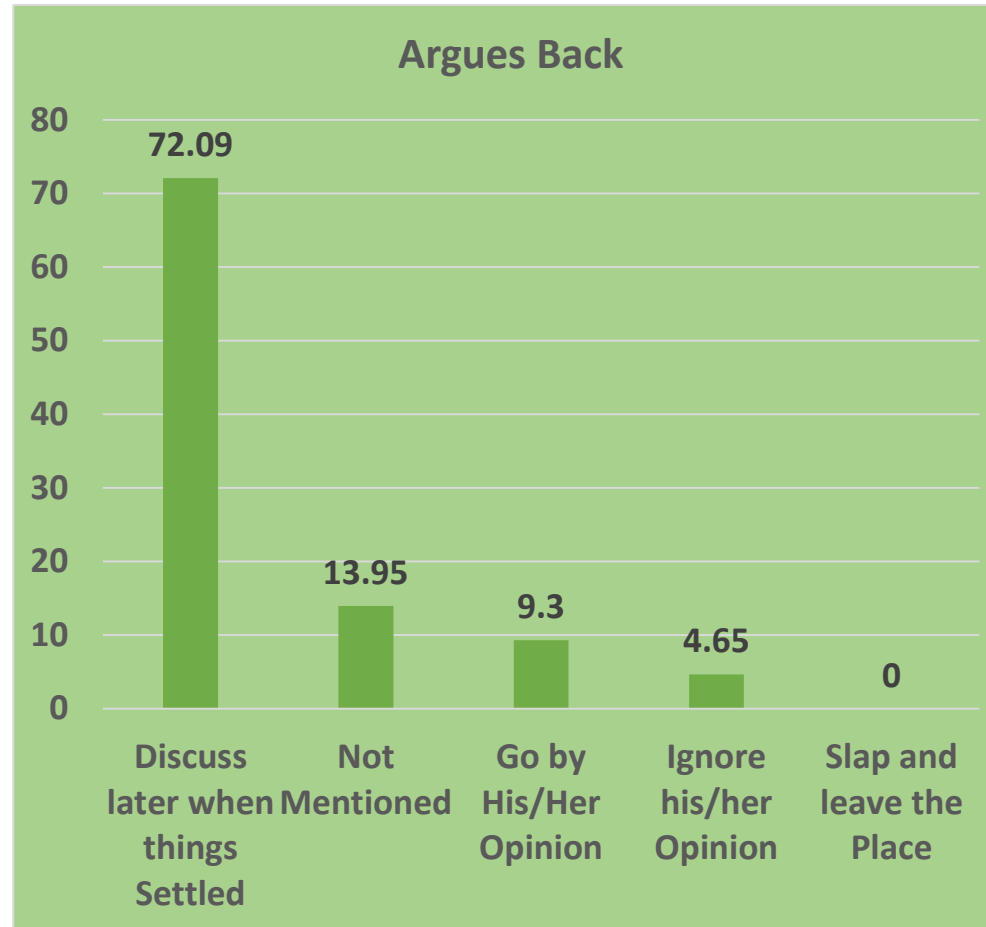
Slap him/her and leave the place

Not say anything then and discuss later when things are settled

The scope of argument or discussion won't be there as you don't ask for his/her opinion ever

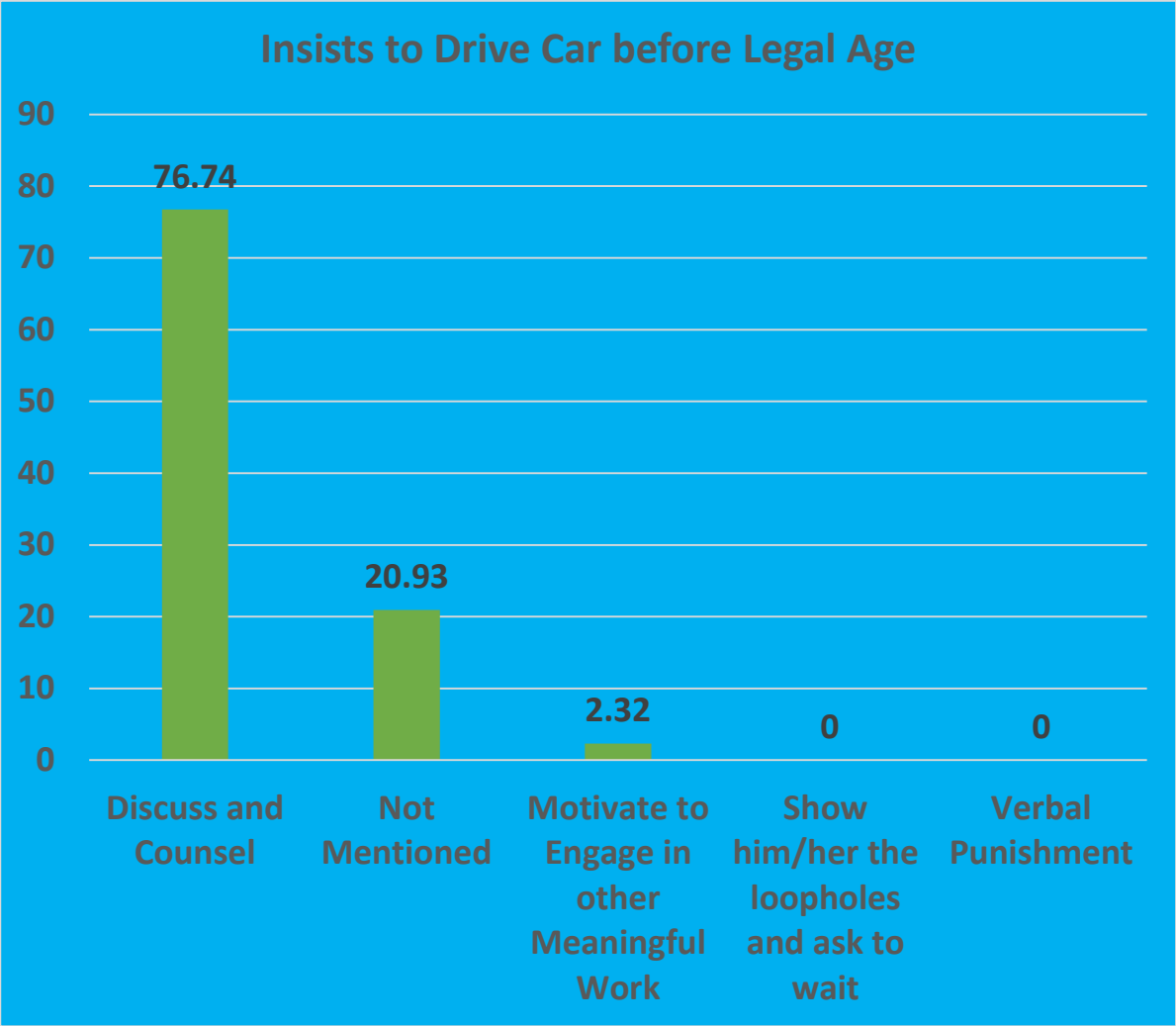
Go by his/her opinion so that he/she is happy

Not Mentioned



Situation 13: Your child is in the age range of 15-18 years and is persistent upon driving a car even though s/he is not experienced enough

Compare him/her with his/her friends who are not driving but are performing well in other domains so that s/he is motivated to engage in meaningful work	
Guide him/her through proper training and discuss about the legal age and consequences of not abiding by the rules.	
Show him/her their loopholes and ask them to get over it in order to get permission for driving	
Give him/her verbal punishment(scolding) when s/he asks for driving a car	
Not Mentioned	



MAJOR FINDINGS

- 1. Most of the parents are graduates and above, are employed with various sectors having average income and majority of them have single child.**
- 2. The top eight areas of concern for parents are related to food, cleanliness, mobile phone addiction, argument, disrespecting elders, laziness, stubbornness and nagging.**
- 3. Though most of the parents have answered that discussion is the primary method of disciplining the children they adopt, in specific situations, it is not observed.**
- 4. The second most important strategy that parents adopt to discipline their children is to avoid talking followed by the third strategy which is unknown (not mentioned). Are they hiding something? Further investigation may help us understand why the third most important strategy adopted by them does not have a name.**
- 5. Except three situations (Nos. 2, 4 and 8), the first strategies to discipline children contradicts with our observation on how parents discipline their children. The responses seem to be biased in favor of a social-desirability effect.**
- 6. 'Other Methods' and 'Not Mentioned' options have appeared quite frequently in almost all situations. Such results might be attributed to parental unwillingness to disclose the methods for the fear of disapproval from the society.**
- 7. Our observations of children and their parents suggest that academics is given the top priority and any deviation in fulfilling the objective is handled very strongly by the parents. Practices of various disciplinary methods are observed quite frequently in this situation.**
- 8. Physical and verbal punishments though present in Indian families as a method of discipline, the data is to justify the claim.**

DISCUSSION

Societal pressure to depict oneself in a healthy way always does more harm than good. Despite facing the challenges from the children, parents are forced to depict a picture of “ideal” parents. The only time they disclose the truth is, when it comes to children’s academic indiscipline. But, in other situations, they prefer not to disclose the strategies of disciplining or answer in a socially-desirable way. Such a behavior of denial may prove harmful for the children in future. Hence, parent counselling to help the parents to assess themselves as well as their children would prove beneficial.

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