

My name is Ksee Soneye, I was born in Glasgow but grew up in Nigeria. I am currently one of the managers in the Children, Young People & Family Health Services Directorate in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

My journey through the NHS started while I was in university, I worked as a healthcare support worker on the NHS bank, going on to be on the NHS Grad scheme, then I worked as a Senior Manager in Finance, and now in Operations.

I really appreciate growing up in Nigeria and I loved the culture. Part of my family are Christians, some Muslims and some are pagan worshippers. It was an experience growing up in that environment, but I have been back in UK for 23 years now and it still baffles me how my accent hasn't changed at all.

On 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2022, I went to Manchester to celebrate my younger brother's birthday; after the festivities, we got talking about life in general. We ended up talking about growing up; I said to him, "remember all the beatings we got from dad, he really did discipline us", my brother turned to me and said, "KSee, dad physically abused us!". I almost asked him to shut up, I had never thought of my dad as being physically abusive to us as kids. I just thought of him as someone preparing his kids for what's out there, someone who wants the best for his kids and wants them to succeed in life. Oh, the conflict! I will deviate from this for a while, but I will come back to it.

In the last 18 months, I have seen a lot of safeguarding/child protection cases walk through the doors of St David's Children Centre. I get it, children can be naughty at times, but how is it discipline when you leave bruises on the child? Don't get me wrong, am not saying every safeguarding/child protection case that walks in the door of the hospital is because of physical abuse, far from it, I am trying to understand those that are as a result of physical abuse.

When I talk about growing up in Nigeria with my friends who also grew up in Africa and how each of us were smacked or beaten, most of them had the same experience as me. You weren't only beaten at home by your parents, you were beaten at school by your teachers too. We always seem to joke about it, and it sounds like a bragging tool; as in what I endured as a kid means I can survive anything. I believe the way we were brought up is a cultural thing; it is also a generational thing because that is the way our parents and their parents were brought up too.

I remember I once absconded from school, and my dad found out, I was beaten with everything he could lay his hands on. There was another time, I was being

disrespectful to my aunt, my dad made me squat (we called it up and down as kids) for what seem like forever. By the time I was asked to stop, I was so dehydrated and dizzy, I had to be rushed to the hospital. Just two examples; but I still appreciate my dad.

In November 2022, I received a complaint about a member of my staff. She had asked the parent of a child who had been brought in for a continence appointment why she hadn't asked the child why she didn't go to the toilet on time. That was wrong in every sense and level. My staff member is of Eastern Asian culture, and although what she said isn't appropriate, I can honestly say that is exactly what she would have said to her own child – “go to the toilet on time.”

At the risk of sounding controversial, I believe religion plays an important role in this. The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment says, “Honour your Father and Mother so your days will be long in the land that your God has given you”, but then you look at Proverbs 13:24 which says, “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him”. In layman terms if I was looking at “spare the rod and spoil the child”, literally, where is the line between discipline and physical abuse, how do you discipline a child with a rod?

There was an article in the Mirror on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023, in which a Christian mum had starved her three-year-old son to death during a religious fast in order to starve off COVID. The question that raged through my mind was how and why could this happen to a 3-year-old child? I was so triggered, I started remembering how much my dad made me fast because I didn't get all “A”s, God forbid I had a C. All we heard growing up was you need more God in your life; every-time we were naughty it was between God and smacking.

Looking at the laws around smacking and physical abuse, they are not protective enough. There are laws to protect in Wales, but these could not be agreed in England maybe because they don't factor in the effect of religion and culture. I think getting the right people in the room together might bridge the gap and stop the generational cycle. Laws should be made that are realistic, ones that can be followed.

But for now, I want people to just talk, talk to your friends and families, ask them the questions: - What is their idea of discipline? What do they feel the difference between discipline and physical abuse is? How would they discipline their children? Or how would they expect you to discipline your children?

There is a quote attributed to Edmund Burke

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men (women) to do nothing”.

We need to educate people on the trauma that has been caused by physical abuse. We need to ask the relevant questions; people will bring their culture and religion into this, so we need to bridge the gap and make laws that fit.

We in the NHS, already have safeguarding courses, but I feel like these are an after-thought, because the damage has already been done. The child is already feeling the trauma, and for me that's unfair. We need to stop the problem at the root, so let's just talk to our friends and families. I know it's not the nicest conversation to have but the people you speak to will speak to other people who in turn will speak with other people.

My joy to share and thanks for listening.