What is the Relationship Between Childhood Physical Punishment and Adult Outcomes?

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Theoretical Background

Corporal Punishment

“Use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child’s behaviour”

(Straus & Donelly, 2001, p.4)
Prevalence

• U.S. epidemiological studies revealed that 26-67% of parents used corporal punishment (e.g. Taylor et al., 2010)

• In Canada, data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) revealed that, in 2008, 23-26% of parents reported using corporal punishment (Fréchette & Romano, 2013)

• Increases from infancy to age 2 years, reaches its peak during the preschool years, and decreases from 5 years onward (e.g. Straus & Stewart, 1999; Vittrup et al., 2006)
Theoretical Background

Developmental Outcomes

• Corporal punishment is a developmental risk factor associated with greater social and emotional problems in children and youth (Gershoff, 2002a)

• The effects of corporal punishment also appear to continue into adulthood (Afifi et al, 2012; Gershoff, 2002a; Hicks-Pass, 2009; Gamez-Guadix et al., 2010)
  – Mood and anxiety disorders, substance use problems, greater aggression, higher tolerance for violence, criminal/antisocial behaviour, increased risk of harsh parenting with one’s own child, and increased violence with one’s partner
Theoretical Background

Gershoff’s (2002) process-context model

### Stable Individual and Relational Context
- e.g., child (sex, temperament), parent (psychological functioning, overall parenting style and beliefs), family (size, structure)

### Interactional Context
- e.g., emotional state of the parent/child

### Corporal Punishment
- Co-Occurring Disciplinary Strategies

### Short and Long-Term Outcomes
- e.g., aggression, mental health, child-parent relationship

### Social-Cultural Context
- e.g., SES, ethnicity, social support, geographic region

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Research Objectives

• Examine the association between childhood spanking and young adults’ (1) relationship with parents; (2) sense of family; (3) sense of competence; and (4) approval of violence

• Take into account
  – co-occurring discipline (positive discipline, non-physical punishment, psychological aggression)
  – parent’s emotional state during discipline (anger)
  – overall parenting style (consistency, warmth, impulsivity)

• Control for factors from the different contextual layers (i.e., childhood physical abuse, violence socialization, child sex and ethnicity, number of siblings, and SES)
Participants and Procedures

- 365 undergraduate students completed an on-line questionnaire
- Questionnaire package previously developed for the International Parenting Study (IPS)
  - Focuses on methods used by parents to correct children’s misbehaviours
  - Involves a research consortium of approximately 20 nations representing all major world regions

(http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/IPS.htm)
Sample Demographics

- 76% female
- 92% between 18-24 years old
  - 6% between 25-39, 2% ≥ 40
- 60% European descent
  - 12% African-Canadian, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Middle Eastern, 10% Other
- 60% single
  - 40% in a relationship (30% dating, 10% married or cohabitating)
Measures

Outcomes

• Quality of relationship with parents (3 items; Parent-Child Closeness Scale)
• Sense of family (2 items; Familism Scale)
• Sense of personal (in)competence (3 items; Personal Mastery Scale)
• Violence approval (6 items; Personal and Relationship Profile [PRP]; Straus et al., 2007)

Predictors

• Frequency of childhood spanking (1 item; Dimensions of Discipline Inventory [DDI]; Straus & Fauchier, 2007)
• Frequency of co-occurring disciplinary strategies
  – Positive discipline (7 items; DDI; reward, explain/teach, diversion)
  – Non-physical punishment (6 items; DDI; deprivation of privileges and penalty tasks)
  – Psychological aggression (4 items; DDI)
Measures

Moderators

- Emotional state of the parent
  - Parental anger (1 item; DDI)
- Parenting style
  - Parental impulsiveness (2 items; DDI)
  - Consistency of discipline (3 items; DDI)
  - Parental warmth/support (3 items; DDI)

Controls

- Childhood physical abuse (5 items; Conflict Tactics Scale Parent-Child Version [CTSPC]; Straus et al., 1998)
- Violence socialization (4 items; PRP)
- Participant sex and ethnicity
- Parental education and employment
- Number of siblings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship with parents</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family (Sense of duty)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0-3</td>
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<td>Family (Sticking together)</td>
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<td>0-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of incompetence</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>0-9</td>
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<td>Violence approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanking</td>
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<td>0-18</td>
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<td>Psychological aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental anger</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>0-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental impulsiveness</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
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<td>Consistency of discipline</td>
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<td>Parental warmth/support</td>
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<td>Violence socialization</td>
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## Sense of Incompetence

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<td>Non-physical punishment</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>Physical abuse</td>
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<td>Violence socialization</td>
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$\beta$ = unstandardized estimate; SE = standard error

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
## Relationship With Parents

<table>
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<td>Non-physical punishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological aggression</td>
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<td>Parental warmth</td>
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β = unstandardized estimate; SE = standard error
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
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<th>Predictor Variables</th>
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$\beta = \text{unstandardized estimate}; \ SE = \text{standard error}$

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### Sense of Duty to One’s Family

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<tr>
<td>Parental consistency</td>
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$\beta = \text{unstandardized estimate}; \ SE = \text{standard error}$

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Family Members Need to Stick Together

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental consistency</td>
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<td>.02</td>
</tr>
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$\beta =$ unstandardized estimate; SE = standard error  
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Discussion

- Greater frequency of childhood spanking was associated with greater violence approval as adults
  - Spanking was not significantly associated with other outcomes (competence, relationship with parents, sense of family)

- Co-occurring discipline is important to consider
  - Greater frequency of childhood non-physical punishment was associated with greater sense of competence, better relationship with parents, and less sense of duty toward family of origin as adults
  - Greater frequency of psychological aggression appears to negatively impact current relationship with one’s parents

- Child physical abuse was associated with a less sense of competence and a worse relationship with parents
Discussion

• Modes of interaction (parental anger, consistency, warmth, impulsiveness) alone and in combination with childhood spanking experiences did not show many statistically significant relationships with the outcomes
  – Exception was that greater parental consistency was associated with a greater sense of family

• More distal variables also seem to play a role in some instances
  – Less exposure to violence socialization during childhood was associated with greater sense of competence and less violence approval
Thank you!
Merci!