

3. (*double-weighted*) What methodological challenges must psychologists face in trying to research the effects of spanking? (Include all ten areas you learned, with one example for each. For causality, use one of the potential outcomes you identified in #2.)

4. Read the attached section, from a textbook (“The Case Against Corporal Punishment”: Papalia, Gross, & Feldman, 2003, p. 444) and discuss your reaction. In what ways are the studies described weak and in what ways strong (how well do they address the methodological challenges you identified)? Do any of the findings surprise you?

5. Now read Lynch, Turkheimer, et al (2006) (You can skim over the methods & results: focus on the intro & discussion.) First, identify the study’s two main conclusions (state these in your own words). Next, explain how their research design differs from past work.

6. Having examined your own experience, and the two readings here, what is your position on spanking now? (Note: You do not need to have changed your mind, but you do need to justify your position in the context of both the readings. Your final position is a decision, not an empirical question itself, so can be based on other beliefs & values, but you need to engage the related empirical evidence.)



The Case Against Corporal Punishment

"Spare the rod and spoil the child" may sound old-fashioned, but corporal punishment has become a live issue today. While some professionals view corporal punishment as verging on child abuse (Straus, 1994b), others defend it as necessary or desirable in moderation, when prudently administered by loving parents (Baumrind, 1996a, 1996b).

Corporal punishment has diminished in many European countries since the passage of laws against it in Sweden in 1979, followed by Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Croatia, and Latvia; and a number of other countries are considering such laws. Yet in the United States some professionals—and politicians—advocate corporal punishment more strongly than ever. In 1999 the Arizona and Arkansas legislatures adopted resolutions urging parents and teachers to exercise their right to use it. All states make it an exception to the crime of assault.

Some form of corporal, or bodily, punishment is widely used on U.S. infants, and it is virtually universal among parents of toddlers. In interviews with a nationally representative sample of 991 parents in 1995, 35 percent reported using corporal punishment—usually hand slapping—on infants during the previous year, and fully 94 percent on 3- and 4-year-olds. About half of the parents continued to use corporal punishment by the time their children were 12, one-third at age 14, and 13 percent at age 17 (Straus & Stewart, 1999).*

Opponents of corporal punishment are not against disciplining children, but they maintain there are more effective, less risky or harmful ways to do it. A large body of research has consistently found negative outcomes from its use. Apart from the risk of injury to the child, these outcomes include increased physical aggression in childhood and anxiety disorders, depression, alcohol problems, antisocial behavior, and partner abuse later in life (MacMillan et al., 1999; Strassberg, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994).

Most of this research was cross-sectional or retrospective, and the few longitudinal studies did not consider that the spanked children may have been aggressive in the first place, and that their aggressive behavior might have led their parents to spank them. Since 1997 several large, nationally representative landmark studies (Brezina, 1999; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998; Strauss & Paschall, 1999; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997) have overcome this defect by taking account of the child's own behavior at the time of first measurement.

These studies, which included youngsters ranging from age 3 through adolescence, found that corporal punishment is counterproductive: the more a child receives, the more aggressive or antisocial the child's behavior becomes, and the more likely that child is to show antisocial or other maladaptive behavior as a child and as an adult (Straus & Stewart, 1999).

Why is this so? One answer is that physical punishment stimulates aggressive behavior by leading children to imitate the punisher and to consider infliction of pain an acceptable response to problems. Furthermore, as with any punishment, the effectiveness of spanking diminishes with repeated use; children may feel free to misbehave if they are willing to take the consequences. Reliance on physical punishment may weaken parents' authority when children become teenagers, too big and strong to spank even if spanking were appropriate (AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 1998; McCord, 1996).

Spanking may even inhibit cognitive development, according to data on 2- to 4-year-olds and 5- to 9-year-olds from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth. Children whose mothers used little or no corporal punishment (such as spanking or hand slapping) during a two-week period showed greater cognitive gains than children who received corporal punishment (Straus & Paschall, 1999).

The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health (1998) urges parents to avoid spanking. Instead, the committee suggests such inductive methods as helping children learn to use words to express feelings, giving children choices and helping them evaluate the consequences, and modeling orderly behavior and collaborative conflict resolution. The committee recommends positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors. Verbal reprimands, "time-outs" (isolating the child for a short time to give the child a chance to cool down), and removal of privileges are recommended ways to discourage undesired behaviors within the context of a positive, supportive, loving parent-child relationship.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

Did your parents ever spank you? If so, how often and in what kinds of situations? Would you spank, or have you ever spanked, your own child? Why or why not?

CHECK IT OUT . . .

For more information on this topic, go to www.mhhe.com/papaliat1, where you'll find a link to the website of a policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Guidance for Effective Discipline" (RE9740).

*Unless otherwise referenced, the material and viewpoint in this box are based on Straus (1999) and Straus & Stewart (1999).