

A study on corporal punishment sociology essay



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Do parents think corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline?

Corporal punishment plays an important role in today's society. It affects the parents' attitudes physically and physiologically. Academic studies have established that under some circumstances, corporal punishment of children can increase short term compliance with parental commands (Smith, Ray, Stefurak, & Zachar, 2007). To determine if the level of corporal punishment is gradually becoming more abusive rather than being a deterrent to misbehavior, researchers examined adults by determining if parents used mild, moderate, or severe types of punishment. Although corporal punishment can lead to negative results in many cases, reports showed positive alternatives to corporal punishment such as warmth, lecturing, and time out. These alternative forms of punishment provide a variety of techniques that affect an individual's attitude towards discipline as well as gender and social interactions between parents and their children. Conflict on the topic is pervasive at multiple levels. Milder punishment does not suppress the behavior as completely as more severe forms of discipline. Many parents who use corporal punishment towards their children report feeling remorse or guilt after doing so (Socolar, Savage, Keyes-Elstein, & Evans, 2006). A variety of situational factors can moderate the effects of corporal punishment. The prospective studies on corporal punishment will demonstrate that the use is directly and proportionately associated with increased rates of many factors, such as becoming over aggressive. Researchers contend to believe that this "minor" form of physical violence is a precursor to much violence that plagues our world.

Literature Review

The data that was found stemmed from the sociological research of various researchers. In other researchers' findings, they have investigated different opinions of parents and children to see if corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. Most of the current researchers' findings were similar to those of previous researchers on the same topic; however, subsequent investigators brought forth a counter argument to some of the different views that were held. These revisionist scholars developed different hypotheses from finding new discoveries as well, such as, if corporal punishment caused parents to become abusive and to what extent parents employed corporal punishment. They used questionnaires and surveys for parents from different demographic regions such as the Appalachian, New England, Midwest, and the Deep South to use as sample population test groups. The population group was sub-categorized by gender, race, and social status. The researchers' findings gave the participants the chance to understand if corporal punishment is the best solution for changing a child's behavior and if they are using corporal punishment for the wrong purposes.

One group of researchers discovered that the parental characteristics showed that older parents are less likely to use corporal punishment and that mothers spank more often than fathers (Socolar et al. 2006). Another group of scholars found that a small portion of Appalachian mothers tend to agree with them. From their questionnaire, mothers reported using corporal punishment more frequently than using reasoning and rewards (Fish, Amerikaner, & Conrae, 2006). Other reports suggested mothers were more likely to use corporal punishment if the degree of misbehavior evolved into a

power struggle. Physical punishment was indicated as the last resort for gaining control in a disciplinary situation (Smith et al. 2007).

The researchers wanted to investigate the reasons why parents would consider the use of corporal punishment. They found that most of the discipline techniques were influenced by their parents (Fish et al. 2006). Lower socioeconomic status has been associated with more frequent corporal punishment (Socolar et al. 2006). Lower socioeconomic status causes families to experience poverty, which may negatively influence a parent's ability to properly discipline a child. Interestingly, long-term stressors such as worries about food, shelter, and money were positively associated with the use of corporal punishment, while short-term stressors such as feeling tired or having a bad day at the time the discipline occurred were negatively associated with the use of corporal punishment (Socolar et al. 2006). The level of education of parents was found to have an impact on why they used corporal punishment. Other groups of researchers also concurred with previous researchers reporting that younger, single, less-educated mothers tend to use high levels of corporal punishment when parenting their young children (Nicholson, Anderson, Fox, & Brenner, 2002).

To determine if the level of corporal punishment is gradually becoming more abusive rather than being a deterrent to misbehavior, the researchers examined adults by identifying if a parent used mild, moderate and severe types of punishment. The degree of the punishment determines the response of the child (Smith et al. 2007). These findings agree with their hypotheses and others as well. Based on gender role stereotypes, parents, particularly fathers, may still believe that boys require physical discipline

more so than girls to change their behavior (McKee, Roland, Coffelt, Olson, Forehand, Massari, Jones, Gaffney, & Zens, 2005). Other studies showed that women would be more sensitive than men to changes in the severity of the types of discipline and the types of transgression (Smith et al. 2007).

To examine the effectiveness of corporal punishment, researcher used children as independent variables to verify if the parents' responses were similar to the actual outcomes reported by children. One report examined children internalizing and externalizing problems such as emotional problems and how one would interact with others. The findings in this investigation is supported by previous research because children reported low levels of corporal punishment associated with a parent's report of child internalizing and externalizing problems (McKee et al. 2005). To find out if gender was the reason of low levels reported by children, the investigators split the parents into 4 categories: mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons. Findings suggest that the association between harsh parental discipline and behavior problems in children is not more pronounced in same gender dyads (McKee et al. 2005). The findings also indicate contextual factors, such as the behavior of the child and the type of discipline being delivered. These factors do influence change in both parents and children (Smith et al. 2007).

When classifying the use of corporal punishment by race, the results differ. Findings suggest that younger Caucasian mothers were associated more with demonstrating how to properly perform a task than young African American mothers (Socolar et al. 2006). The upper middle class Caucasian sample is associated with having low internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors among children (McKee et al. 2005). Conflicting evidence has

challenged previous arguments. African American families tend to be more power-assertive and use more punitive measure than Caucasian families (Socolar et al. 2006). The Southern part of the United States has a higher report of corporal punishment due to a higher African American population (Socolar et al. 2006). The research in Alabama and North Carolina may confirm earlier research that showed corporal punishment to be most common in the Deep South.

Although corporal punishment can lead to negative results such as depression, reports showed positive alternatives to corporal punishment in many cases. Cognitive-behavioral methods have emerged as the most effective interventions for working with behavior problems in children (Nicholson et al. 2002). The scholars found that the negative results of using cognitive-behavioral methods include the fact that many of the programs that have been offered in office or university based settings have focused on predominately Caucasian, middle-class families (Nicholson et al. 2002). The families of the Head Start program were used as a control group in a study conducted by Nicholson et al. (2002) which examined the effects of using the STAR Parenting Program on children's behavior. The STAR Parenting Program is another example of a psycho- educational parenting program that has been shown to be effective with a diverse group of parents. The program integrates cognitive-behavioral, developmental, and social learning theories to help parents of young children thoughtfully respond rather than emotionally react to their young children's challenging behavior (Nicholson et al. 2002). Parents participating in this program significantly improved their involvement in their child's education process (Nicholson et al. 2002). The

researchers expected that positive parenting, in particular warmth, would protect children from the detrimental outcomes of harsh discipline practices (McKee et al. 2005). Increasing parental warmth may protect children from the detrimental influences of harsh physical discipline, but not verbal discipline (McKee et al. 2005).

All of the researchers concluded that it is very useful to incorporate counseling when choosing to use corporal punishment because corporal punishment was reported to become gradually severe in some cases. Parents may become over aggressive because of social problems or stressors. Thus, positive alternatives to corporal punishment led scholars to believe corporal punishment is not effective unless it is used in the proper manner. Parental behavior as a function of the degree to which the punishment fits the crime believes to be apparent.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to determine if parents think corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. The current research project included 30 participants that consisted of 20 females and 10 males. Six were African American males, 19 were African American females, 3 were Caucasians males, and 1 was a Caucasian female. One was an Asian Male. Participants' ages ranged from 20-80. The researcher was granted permission to use randomly drawn samples from Claflin University and the surrounding neighborhoods in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

The survey method was selected in conducting this research experiment because it provides a brief profile of my target population and their attitudes

towards my research questions. One benefit of using the survey method is that it allowed me to observe things that can not be easily observed, like one's past experiences. Another benefit of using the survey method is that it provided anonymity of participants' personal opinions. The disadvantage of using the survey method is that people sometimes provide misleading information.

Each participant was handed a manila envelope which will had the survey questions inside. The survey consisted of twenty questions that are a combination of open and closed ended responses. Instructions were reviewed and all questions were answered before participants were asked to complete the survey. The average time range for the survey lasted approximately fifteen minutes. Each survey was placed back into the manila envelope after completion. All participants gave written consent (See Appendix A), proving that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The independent variable in this survey is the actual use of corporal punishment. The dependent variable is the effectiveness of the use of corporal punishment. Each participant was instructed to respond to each survey question item by either filling in the selected answers or writing short answers (See Appendix B). The first four items asked the participants to identify their gender, age, ethnicity, and highest level of education. This information was used to check the background of the participants to place them into categories. Different categories were chosen to establish the background for why the participants chose to use corporal punishment, if that was their choice. The fifth and sixth questions asked the participants to

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identity their social class and who raised them as a child. These questions were used to obtain information about the generational difference between the participants and their caregiver. The seventh and eighth questions asked the participants to identify the gender of their children and to identify how many they have. The ninth question asked participants to define corporal punishment in their own words. I used this approach because I was interested in determining whether mothers and fathers were aware of the definition of corporal punishment before considering this method of discipline. The tenth question was used to identify if the participant was married or single. The rest of the questions asked how parents generally viewed and used corporal punishment. The last ten items were used to identify if corporal punishment is a deterrent to children's misbehavior.

Results

As it relates to ethnicity and gender, the data revealed that 33% of African American males reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline, while 50% of African American males reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline. The remaining 17% of African American males reported that the effectiveness of corporal punishment depended upon the child. Similarly, 33% of Caucasian males reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline and 67% of Caucasian males reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline. One Asian male responded to the survey. He reported that he does not think that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. Only 26% of African American females reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline and 21% of them reported that corporal

punishment is not an effective form of discipline. Fifty-three percent of African American females reported that the effectiveness of corporal punishment depends upon the child. One Caucasian female responded to the survey and reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline.

With respect to social class and age, the data indicated 17% of the participants in the middle class who were within the age range of 20-29 reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. This compares to 33% of middle class participants within the same age range who reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline, and 50% of middle class participants reported that the effectiveness of corporal punishment depends on the child. One working class participant in the age range of 20-29 reported corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. None of the participants were members of the higher class within this age range.

The data also indicates that 29% of middle class participants' ages 30-39 reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline; however, 57% of middle class participants ages 30-39 reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline. Fourteen percent reported that the effectiveness of corporal punishment depends on the child. Among working class participants ages 30-39, no one reported yes to corporal punishment as an effective form of discipline. A total of 33% of working class participants ages 30-39 reported corporal punishment is not an effective discipline and 67% reported that it depends upon the child. None of the participants were members of the higher class within this age range.

Thirty-three percent of middle class participants' ages 40-49 reported that corporal punishment is an effective discipline. A total of 67% of middle class participant in the age range of 40-49 reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form discipline. There were no working and upper class participants ages 40-49. No one reported that the effectiveness of corporal punishment depends upon the child.

Forty percent of participants classified as middle class ages 50-59 reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. Forty percent of middle class participants in the age range of 50-59 reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline and 20% reported that it depends on the child. One working class participant in the age range of 50-59 reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form discipline. No one reported being a part of the upper class.

One hundred percent of middle class participants ages 60 and above reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of punishment depending on the child. One working class participant age 60 and above reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline based on the child. No one reported being a part of the upper class.

Twenty-seven percent of participants raised by both parents reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline and 24% of participants raised by both parents reported that corporal punishment is not an effective discipline. Forty-nine percent reported that it depends upon the child. A total of 33% of participants raised by their mother only reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline. Sixty-seven

participants who were raised by their mothers reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline. However, 50% of participants who were raised by someone other than by their mother and father reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline.

As it relates to being a single or married parent, 32% of married participants reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline, while 26% of married participants reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline. Forty-two percent reported that it depends upon the child. Twenty percent of single parents reported that corporal punishment is an effective form of discipline and 40% of single parents reported that corporal punishment is not an effective discipline, and forty percent reported that it depends upon the child.

With regards to the participants' who experienced receiving corporal punishment as a child, 28% of participants' reported corporal punishment as an effective form of discipline, while 30% reported corporal punishment as not an effective form of discipline. Forty-two percent reported that it depends upon the child. Sixteen percent of participants' who did not experience receiving corporal punishment as a child, reported corporal punishment as an effective form of discipline. Similarly, 42% of participants who did not experience receiving corporal punishment as a child reported that corporal punishment was not an effective form of discipline. Only 42% of participants reported that it depends upon the child.

Conclusion

This survey of 30 participants produced a number of surprising results to question number 20 (see appendix B). However, the consistent theme has been that the child determines if corporal punishment is the most effective form of discipline. Overall, African American males reported that corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline. While African American females agree, they further reported that it depends on the child. African Americans as a whole tend to support the use of corporal punishment as effective form of discipline compared to Caucasians. This supports previous research that Caucasians are less likely to support corporal punishment (McKee et al. 2005). There tends to be a positive correlation between an individuals age and their thoughts on corporal punishment. Older African Americans were more likely to support the use of corporal punishment as an effective form of discipline. This gives a possible explanation to the generational shift associated with previous research (Fish et al. 2006). African Americans, regardless of social class, supported corporal punishment; however, members of the working class tend to think the effectiveness of corporal punishment depends upon the child. Participants raised by both parents were more likely to indicate that effective corporal punishment depends upon the child. However, participants raised in a single parent home, specifically their mothers, indicated that corporal punishment is not an effective form of punishment. This response is supported with previous research that single mothers maybe less effective when using corporal punishment (Socolar et al. 2006). Half of single parents indicated that corporal punishment was not an effective method. The other half indicated that its effectiveness depends upon the child, which mirrors the

response of most non-single parents. Participants who received corporal punishment as a child were more likely to report that its effectiveness depends upon the child. The results of this project may lend credibility to the use of corporal punishment among older African Americans who are members of the working class.

There were limitations of this research project. First, the sample population only included 30 participants. A larger sample would make it more reasonable to generalize the findings to the larger population. Another limitation of this research project is that more than half of the participants were African American. Only one Caucasian female and one Asian Male participated in this research. With limited access to more participants of several of ethnic backgrounds, it is difficult to draw sound conclusions about the use and effectiveness of corporal punishment among different cultures. The final limitation of this research study is that each social class was not represented in the project. Only members of the working and middle class took part in the project.

Given the results reported by the participants, a new question has developed for future research projects. The new research question is “ Does the use of corporal punishment yield long term positive behavior in children?” The following recommendations and suggestions are considered important for any future research conducted to determine the effectiveness of corporal punishment. First, it is recommended that more Caucasians be included in the sample of this project. Second, a larger sample size will allow the researcher to make more informed generalizations back into the population.

Finally, the researcher recommends extending the study to include participants in the upper class.

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