

Corporal punishment, analysis of the psychological evidence



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Controversy for the use of reasonable force and its appropriateness for reinforcing behaviours is a main issue in states (Gershoff, 2002). Corporal punishment has been deemed illegal in various countries through adopted policies and laws, though it is suggested to have been applied to 94 percent of toddlers aged between three and four (Straus & Stewart, 1999). Many psychologists believe that there is established evidence to support the suggestion that corporal punishment; administered in the correct method; can be effective, and dominates any negative constructs. The evidence to support this hypothesis is extensive, and attributes of corporal punishment have not been methodically investigated thoroughly for a solid conclusion. The purpose of this essay is to explore the arguments for and against corporal punishment as an effective form of discipline; through empirical evidence the analysis will provide negative and positive examples of child behaviour with regard to corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment consists of conditioning behaviours; A method that can be used in classical by pairing CS with a UCS to produce a CR. For the purpose of this essay Corporal punishment, negative reinforcement and punishment are forms of operant conditioning; they all serve the purpose of adjusting a particular behaviour but are not part of the principles of classical conditioning, and it is essential in the establishment of this essay to demonstrate the key differences to eliminate any misinterpretations.

Negative reinforcement is administered to strengthen the target behaviour by taking away an unpleasant stimulus, punishment is to oppress and extinguish a particular behaviour by administering an unpleasant stimulus or removing a positive stimulus (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, Woolf, Jamieson,

Haslam, Slaughter, 2012). The definition of corporal punishment varies between political and scientific positions. Laws against corporal punishment may define it as a form of physical abuse; all behaviours that risk the result of physical injury may be considered abuse, the definition for this essay remains methods of physical discipline that do not risk injury (Straus, 1994).

Immediate compliance is the initial aim for uses of corporal punishment (Gershoff, 2002). Experiments with pigeons by Holz & Azrin (1961) showed that a pigeon's response on pecking a plastic disk would decrease with the use of an electric shock when the bird fulfilled the particular behaviour. As a result, this form of positive punishment showed that compliance could be achieved by the giving of an unpleasant stimulus. Advocates for corporal punishment have derived from its effectiveness on extinguishing objectionable behaviours; longitudinal studies on behavioural parent training in clinics concluded that children's undesired behaviours were decreased as their compliance increased. (Baumrind, Larzelere & Cowan, 2002) Hence, they were able to manipulate behaviour more effectively if the individual was compliant. Gershoff (2002) argued that an outcome from her studies reported children's response to directive was exceptionally immediate with the application of corporal punishment. Sixty percent of the studies that came to this conclusion were laboratory based (Holden, 2002), which Domjan (2010) argued is an effective environment for behavioural change but only if they were consistent, immediate and not associated with external stimulus; all though these are strict conditions that psychologists haven't even perfected.

Holden (2002) argues that psychological sensory information is stimulated when a child is punished; assuming there is initial physical, neurophysiological reactions like pain, anger and humiliation are expected to transpire. Aggression is one of the most discussed outcomes for corporal punishment, the collective belief that it provides a model for aggressive behaviour amongst children (Lilienfeld et al). Many psychologists have concluded that the relationship between undesired behaviours and corporal punishment is substantial, including the studies conducted by Gershoff (2002) who established that there were correlations between eleven undesirable child behaviours and corporal punishment through methods of a meta-analysis. Baumrind et al. (2002) argued that the meta-analysis wasn't conclusive enough for an entire injunction on the use of corporal punishment as the evidence to support the theory was inconsistent; the spectrum of studies used all had different hypothesis, methods and procedures making them incomparable and when collectively evaluated, unreliable. Due to issues on its effectiveness studies have continued to obtain more conclusive evidence, Ferguson (2012) conducted a meta-analysis on forty five longitudinal studies that all measured the influence of corporal punishment on externalizing or internalizing behaviour problems. The data indicated there was a trivial to small, but largely substantial relationship between corporal punishment and the development of long term detrimental behaviours. Similarly, Aucoin & Frick (2006) conducted studies within schooling systems to test the associated problems with corporal punishment; through random sampling they collected a number of students, separating them into group's dependant on exposure to corporal punishment.

Comparing it to their level of conduct, they found problems in behavioural
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adjustment with children who had experienced high levels of corporal punishment, but also children who were not part of an emotionally supportive family climate. Additionally, Implications are relevant as it is difficult to suppress other associations that can cause behavioural problems, Such as individuals who experience maltreatment are more likely to develop juvenile delinquency (Goldman, Salus, Wolcott & Kennedy, 2003)

In conclusion the research conducted to date provides a support for the media to state that corporal punishment is associated with negative behaviours, though the evidence in the field remains incomplete and has not explored all aspects of corporal punishment. Consequently the evidence cannot justify the injunction of corporal punishment exclusively, it is necessary to dedicate further studies to research the interactions between corporal punishment and undesired behaviours as the findings could help parents conduct disciplinary methods risk free without the development of negative behaviours; though limitations on this kind.

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The use of corporal punishment to modify children's behaviour is hotly debated in the media. Present an analysis of the psychological evidence on the effectiveness of corporal punishment.