

The Negative Internal and External Effects of Corporal Punishment on Children

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Well over half of Americans practice corporal punishment (CP) on their children

(Maguire-Jack, Gromoske, & Berger, 2012). CP is considered to be spanking or slapping in a way to cause temporary pain, but not long-term damage, for the purpose of discipline (Maguire-Jack et al., 2012). A multitude of studies have been done to examine the effects of spanking on young children at the time the punishment is administered, and the lasting negative effects it may have later in life. Although some theorists question whether or not these studies are valid, many researchers agree that CP can be, and often is, detrimental. Although CP can provide positive,



temporary child compliance, the effects of such actions are deleterious and can last for many years.

Some theorists assert that previously confirmed research findings should be questioned for their legitimacy. For example, Stephanie Hicks-Pass (2009) claims that, despite

“approximately forty-five years of research” of CP directly correlating with poor social and cognitive skills, violence, crime, and aggression (p. 76), other researchers and even policy-

makers should reconsider the findings. She states, “If 94 percent of parents spank, and spanking has been correlated with aggression, suicidality, and psychiatric symptoms, what factor or factors could explain why 94 percent of the population is not suicidal, aggressive or depressed?” (p. 77)



Hicks-Pass then encourages an exploration of “the variables of parental support” (p. 77). She claims strong emotional support from parents is an important factor in children not exhibiting negative characteristics after CP has been administered, thus CP is not necessarily as harmful as research suggests. Although Hicks-Pass’s argument does speak to an important consideration, her conclusion is constricted: What she fails to mention is the plethora of cases of varying

negative internalized and externalized behavior which years of research confirms, however, may not be represented in the statistical form for which she is searching.



CP can cause children to have a poor view of their own self-worth, which may be an entirely internalized behavior. Maguire-Jack, Gromoske, and Berger (2012) state that according to attachment theory, “If a parent spans a child when he or she is crying and in need of comfort, the child may develop an internal working model of the parent (‘other’) as rejecting and of him or her ‘self’ as unworthy of help, comfort, or love. If such a pattern continues over time, the child may become depressed or anxious, or develop a sense of low self-esteem” (p. 1961). In this case, administration of CP makes the child feel distrust, causing him or her to not fully develop a feeling of attachment to the parent who is giving the punishment; these feelings may persist through adulthood. These factors can cause stress on children, not just affecting their view of themselves, but also their academic performance.



Poor cognitive development and skills is also a result of the stress caused from the anxiety associated with CP. Maguire-Jack et al. (2012) states, “recent research on stress and neurobiology has shown that chronic stressors affect children’s brain processes and neurofunctioning” (p. 1961). This statement means that if a child is continually physically punished, this punishment will likely interfere with the child’s cognitive development, causing him or her to not perform as well academically as their non-physically punished counterparts; this kind of punishment can also stunt the child’s ability to develop socially.

CP can be so detrimental that the child may exhibit antisocial behavior, which is one of the effects which manifests externally. Genetic factors may also play a role in the extent to which the antisocial behavior affects the child’s (or adult’s) life. According to Boutwell, Franklin,

Barnes, and Beaver (2011), “exposure to risky environments, when coupled with a genetic vulnerability, may increase the likelihood that a child will develop conduct problems and



antisocial behavior” (p. 566). The child’s history of being physically punished for crying out or otherwise being vocal about their needs, desires, and potentially thoughts, causes him or her to internalize feelings and opinions; this results in a lasting, deeper self-denial, which presents itself as antisocial behavior. A persistence of stress caused by CP and self-suppression can often lead to aggression.

Aggression is another externalized behavior which CP can cause (Boutwell et al., 2011; Gershoff, 2010; Hicks-Pass, 2009; Maguire-Jack et al., 2012) The aggressive child may harm other children, their parents, or themselves. CP-related stressors coupled with parental influence, causes the aggression to turn into violence or abuse. Author Elizabeth Gershoff (2010) writes, “Parents, after all, learn most of their lessons about how to be a parent from their own parents” (p.



32). Physically punished children, in that sense, are more likely to practice CP on their own children, and potentially become even more violent and abuse them, as well as animals or future partners.

Researchers agree that the overwhelming evidence for the destructive nature of physical punishment rules any rebuttal negligible. Years of investigation, including surveys and controlled case studies, have gone into the exploration of the adverse effects of inflicting pain on children to make them behave. The results have overwhelmingly shown that CP is harmful.

Children develop damaging, long-lasting social and mental behaviors, which often times go undiagnosed and unrecorded, thus not being represented by a statistic. Despite temporary relief



for the parent, by hurting their child physically for a short period of time, parents who use CP are really damaging their children for a lifetime.

References

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