

Why Physical Punishment of Children Should be Outlawed
in the United States: A Policy Memorandum

by

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A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Studies in partial fulfillment of
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban
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Abstract

Although it is no longer legal in the United States to beat women, prisoners, or criminals, society's most vulnerable members—children, are the only group of individuals that are not protected from physical punishment. Physical punishment has been abolished in 54 countries globally, but the United States has yet to devise a policy outlawing this type of discipline in its entirety. Physical punishment is still widely practiced in the United States in the home, and strong support for physical punishment was seen in certain religious groups like conservative Protestants who interpret the bible literally, and believe in the “Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child” doctrine. Central to the practice of physical punishment are also social norms around child discipline that condone its use. However, the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) has recognized hitting as a form of violence, and the UN holds that children should be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence. The current study utilized secondary data on physical punishment which was analyzed for frequencies of certain outcomes, and relationships between specific constructs and physical punishment. Research on the subject revealed that physical punishment is associated with several negative outcomes in children like child abuse, increased aggression, mental health issues, and negative parent-child relationship. Some recommendations for addressing the issue of physical punishment include addressing the broader factors like poverty and socioeconomic status, providing support for young mothers, and changing positive attitudes towards physical punishment. By providing an in-depth analysis of the subject of physical punishment, this paper will serve as a policy memorandum that will be submitted to U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand to be used in Congress to champion a law outlawing physical punishment of children in the United States.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Organization of Study

This policy memorandum represents the compilation of a body of literature on physical punishment, an explanation of how the research study is designed, analysis of the data obtained, and proposed recommendations for outlawing the use of physical punishment in the United States.

This paper is organized into five chapters with specific sections. Chapter one is the “Introduction” which gives an overview of the study and guides the reader through the memorandum. It includes the “Statement of the Problem,” a brief narrative that cites data on physical punishment and situates the scope of the problem in the United States. This is followed by the “Purpose of the Study,” where the researcher explains the goals of this research study and the reasons for writing this policy memorandum. Chapter one also includes the “Definition of Terms,” a section that highlights key concepts and terminologies that will be used throughout the paper. The last component of chapter one is the “Research Question,” which states the primary research question that this study answers.

Chapter 2 of the policy memorandum is the “Literature Review” which is divided into three main sections and several subsections. This chapter will review the relevant literature on the subject of physical punishment by primarily studying peer-reviewed journal articles. The theory uncovered in this section will establish a framework that will guide the discussion and proposed recommendations for this policy memorandum.

This will be followed by Chapter 3, the “Research Design.” The research design details how the data was collected and analyzed for this study. Since the current study utilizes secondary data, this chapter further outlines the strengths and weaknesses highlighted by both the primary

and current researchers.

In Chapter 4, the researcher shares the results obtained from the data collected. This research utilizes secondary data, which has already been analyzed by primary researchers. The data is organized into tables and charts which were obtained from sources like peer-reviewed articles and government databases.

Chapter 5 will describe the patterns and relationships found in the data and discuss these findings within the framework of both societal and familial implications of physical punishment. Building on the discussion, as this paper is a policy memorandum, this chapter also provides recommendations on safer intervention strategies in lieu of using physical punishment.

Statement of the Problem

Physical punishment is a common method of discipline, and according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), about 6 in 10 children or 250 million worldwide are physically punished. The use of physical punishment is tied to a strong acceptance of its use, and UNICEF reported that 1.1 billion caregivers globally approve of this discipline method in child rearing (UNICEF, 2017). But there has been some progress on the use of physical punishment; currently, 54 countries have prohibited its use in all settings (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, n.d.). However, there is still room for further change; progressive nations like the U.S., have yet to devise a policy banning physical punishment of children in all settings—physical punishment of children is still legal in all states in the home, and some researchers have held that physical punishment violates the basic human rights of a child, since the UN has articulated that hitting is a form of violence (Knox, 2010).

Research has shown that there is an identifiable link between physical punishment and child physical abuse (Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff, 2010; Knox, 2010 & Freeman & Saunders,

2014) and scholars have concluded that physical punishment is an ineffective form of discipline due to its many harmful effects (Gershoff, 2010). Child abuse is a public health issue that is detrimental to our nation's children and can have devastating short-term and long-term effects on its victims and survivors. In 2016, there were approximately 676,000 reported victims of child abuse and neglect, while there were an estimated 1750 casualties in the United States that same year (Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2018). This issue is quite costly to the United States, with an estimated total lifetime cost of \$124 billion each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2016). HHS has also found that physical abuse is the second most prevalent form of child maltreatment after neglect, accounting for 18.2% of the cases in 2016. These statistics are troubling, and the need to protect some of the most vulnerable members of society (children) could not be more evident. Hence, this study will tackle the issue of physical punishment from a public health and a human rights standpoint. Effectively addressing and outlawing physical punishment will require raising awareness of the problem, a shift in attitudes towards children by acknowledging them as equals in the society, along with a coordinated effort from families, communities, and our policy makers.

Purpose of the Study

The proposed study was designed to acquire a better understanding of physical punishment by investigating the social and contextual factors influencing its use, uncovering reasons for its support, and examining the issue from a human-rights perspective. By showing the association between physical punishment and numerous detrimental outcomes including what researchers believe to be the most troubling—child abuse, the researcher intends to raise awareness on this archaic method of discipline, and highlight safer intervention strategies.

This study represents a culmination of a body of research with evidence that supports the associated dangers of physical punishment, a counternarrative explaining why people still support this form of discipline, and the need for new legislation banning its use. This policy memorandum will use the researcher's findings on the harmful outcomes of physical punishment in conjunction with the human rights argument, and the idea of progress in the enactment of parallel federal legislation like the institution of the Violence Against Women Act, to persuade Senator Kirsten Gillibrand to champion this policy recommendation in Congress, and devise legislation to outlaw the use of physical punishment in the U.S. Significantly, instituting a policy to outlaw the practice of physical punishment of children has many potential benefits. It can result in a reduction in the occurrence of mental health issues, as well as in the number of child abuse cases. The overarching goal of this research study is for children to be treated with respect and dignity, and viewed as equals in the society, in lieu of being perceived as lesser humans lacking protection from all forms of violence.

Definition of Terms and List of Acronyms

1. *Physical Punishment* – a method of discipline that utilizes physical force with the goal of causing a child to experience pain but not injury (Freeman & Saunders, 2014).
2. *Physical Abuse* – a form of child maltreatment where there is non-accidental physical injury to a child which results from actions like beating, stabbing, or hitting with a hand or object (Peterson, Joseph, & Feit, 2014).
3. *ACE* – Adverse Childhood Experience
4. *UNICEF* – United Nations Children Fund
5. *CDC* – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
6. *AAP* – American Association of Pediatrics

7. *HHS* – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
8. *UNCRC* – United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child.
9. *VAWA* – Violence Against Women Act

Research Question

How does a greater understanding of physical punishment against children aid in the enactment of legislation to prohibit its use?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review will discuss the physical punishment of children, a controversial discipline technique which requires the use of physical force. Some find this technique problematic, as it violates the basic right of a child to protection from violence (United Nations, 1989), and the use of physical punishment is associated with several negative child behavioral outcomes and experiences (Gershoff, 2002, Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). While there is a wealth of evidence to support the detrimental effects of physical punishment (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff, 2010; Gershoff, 2013; Knox, 2010), some scholars argue that physical punishment can be effective if it is non-abusive, and administered strategically (Larzelere, 2000).

This review presents an in-depth narrative on physical punishment, by highlighting its prevalence, associated outcomes, and explaining why many condemn this form of discipline. Additionally, a counter-narrative to inform why there is still support for physical punishment is offered, so the conflicting perspectives on this discipline method can be reconciled. To present the narratives, this review is divided into three main sections, which are further divided into several subsections. The first section gives a description, background, and overview of physical punishment. The overview provides a distinction between physical punishment and child abuse, explores contextual factors, gives a global snapshot of physical punishment, identifies factors that influence the use of physical punishment, and shares children's response to physical punishment. The second section explains why scholars have concluded that physical punishment is not recommended. Some of the reasons discussed are human rights arguments, negative consequences of physical punishment, empirical findings on the dangers of physical punishment,

and an explanation of the link between physical punishment and child abuse. The last section delves into the counter-narrative, and presents support for physical punishment. Both religious-based support and social-scientific research-based support are shared.

Description, Background, and Overview of Physical Punishment

Physical Punishment vs. Physical Abuse

According to Straus (1994), physical punishment is defined as “the 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 behavior” (Straus, as cited in Freeman & Saunders, 2014, p. 684). In this review, the terms “physical punishment” and “corporal punishment” will be used interchangeably. The term physical punishment is commonly used by parents in the United States, whereas U.S. government entities and other countries use the verbiage corporal punishment to denote the same practice. Parents frequently use euphemisms like spanking, smacking, whipping, or paddling to describe discipline that utilizes hitting (Gershoff, 2010).

Physical abuse on the other hand, is described as a form of child maltreatment where there is non-accidental physical injury to a child which results from actions like beating, stabbing, or hitting with a hand or object. A key distinction made according to U.S. policies is that physical discipline does not meet the threshold of abuse, as long as it is reasonable and does not result in bodily injury (Peterson, Joseph, & Feit, 2014). But Gershoff, Lee, and Durrant (2017) noted that several entities have held that the dichotomy between the two is a “false one that legitimates violence against children” (p. 9). In fact, Afifi et al. (2017) held that both physical punishment and physical abuse use physical force and the infliction of pain, and are associated with similar mental health outcomes.

Background of Physical Punishment

Researchers have long studied the roots and occurrence of corporal punishment, and have sought ways to restore humanity and dignity to a child through effective intervention strategies (Freeman & Saunders 2014, Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff, 2013; Gershoff, Lee, & Durrant, 2017; Knox, 2010). Gershoff (2010) explained that there is a longstanding history of corporal punishment in the United States. She further emphasized that “corporal punishment of children occurred in a context in which such punishment was also acceptable as a means of punishing adults for infractions, often in the form of public floggings” (p. 32). But Knox (2010) explained in her article, “A Review of Corporal Punishment in the United States,” that currently, it is no longer legal in the U.S. to beat women, prisoners, or criminals, yet it is still legal for parents to physically punish their children, as it falls within the belief in a parent’s right to discipline.

Knox also observed that there is still an entrenched societal view that parents own their children, and a view of children as property, which further promote parents’ sense of justification when they physically punish their children (Knox, 2010). Furthering this argument, Gershoff (2010) noted that there is a generational transfer of corporal punishment stemming from its long tradition in the United States, and perpetuating the practice of hitting children is the influence of religion in shaping beliefs and attitudes about discipline. Some religions like Christianity promote physical discipline over other forms (Gershoff, 2010).

Global Snapshot of Physical Punishment

Physical punishment is a global phenomenon. Freeman and Saunders (2014) highlighted the prevalence and attitudes about physical punishment in various countries. Survey reports revealed this method of discipline in the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Bangladesh and Paraguay, among other nations. These scholars observed a high prevalence and extreme use

of physical force in areas of Africa. Among a sample of women studied, 99% of 500 Kenyan women shared that they have endured physical violence through methods like beatings with objects, punchings, stabbings and kicking.

According to the Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment of Children, 54 countries have currently banned corporal punishment in all settings, and governments in 56 additional countries have made a commitment to banning physical punishment in its entirety, including the home (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, n.d.). Gershoff (2017) noted that Sweden was the first country to institute a total ban on physical punishment, and that these bans are now present in various regions like Europe, Africa, and Central/South America.

But what remains concerning is that the United States has failed to ratify the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) (1989), and ban physical punishment in its entirety (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2013; Knox, 2010). Recent data from the United Nations reveals that the U.S. is only UN member country that has not ratified the convention (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2018). This fact supports the persistence of physical punishment in the U.S.—According to Gershoff (2010), 85% of middle and high schoolers, have experienced physical punishment at some point.

Factors That Influence the Use of Physical Punishment

In addition to the social sanctions for using physical force on children (Knox, 2010), Gershoff (2002) proposed other factors that influence its use. In her 2002 study, one parental factor she identified was age. She noted that younger parents have a higher tendency to use physical punishment, which may be linked to a lack of experience with child-rearing. Studies showed that young mothers utilized physical punishment to address non-offensive behaviors like child learning (Gershoff, 2002). Parent gender was another factor associated with the use of

physical punishment, with higher usage in mothers according to Gershoff. This trend may correlate with the amount of time a child spends with its mother, as women are often caretakers. According to Gershoff (2002), psychological wellbeing of the parent has been linked to parents' use of physical punishment and their positive attitudes towards it. She noted that depression in parents has promoted their use of physical punishment as a discipline measure. Another factor identified by Gershoff (2002) was family characteristics; she explained that attributes like family instability, abusive households, and single-parenting tend to foster the use of physical punishment.

Gershoff (2002) further underscored the impact of broader factors like social support, race and ethnicity, and socio-economic status (SES). Of SES and physical punishment, she wrote that research has confirmed negative associations, meaning that as SES decreases, the use of physical punishment increases. An explanation she proposed for the relationship between these two variables is a result of parental socialization of certain values. Some parents may be equipping their children to be obedient and subservient, which are characteristics required for low-status jobs that the child may likely encounter, hence their use of physical punishment to achieve immediate compliance.

Children's Response to Physical Punishment

By providing feedback from children from different countries, Freeman and Saunders (2014) revealed first-hand children's perspectives on physical punishment. Of some children that have experienced this form of discipline, one Ethiopian child noted that it is necessary to use a whip when children are disobedient, and that it is within parents' rights to punish their children. An Australian child shared that when they grow up, they plan to smack their children at varied levels of intensity if there's an infraction. An explanation for this tendency of hitting children is

that physical punishment is a learned behavior from parents, with an intergenerational transfer (Freedom & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2010). Other children that were interviewed voiced their concern over the use of physical punishment. A ten-year old Scottish child believed that other methods exist to solve behavioral problems, while a nine-year old American child expressed that spanking was unproductive and was a display of the power adults have over their children (Freeman & Saunders, 2014).

Parents' Motivation for the Use Physical Punishment

Gershoff (2010) explained that parents' main motivations for using physical punishment are behavior modification and its power to get children to comply immediately, and in the long term. Some parents believe that hitting children works because it terminates the problematic behavior and it reestablishes the control factor (Freeman & Saunders, 2014, p. 688). But by analyzing results from several social experiments incorporating spanking, Gershoff (2010) concluded that physical punishment is not better than non-violent alternative forms of discipline to achieve short-term compliance, nor was physical punishment shown to be effective in achieving long-term compliance. Gershoff (2010), relying on her earlier 2002 meta-analysis of 15 specific studies, explained that 87% of those studies found that there was a strong correlation between physical punishment and reduced long-term compliance. In her 2002 article on the associated child behaviors and experiences of physical punishment, Gershoff articulated that physical punishment does not usually occur in isolation, so it is difficult to measure compliance exclusively from this discipline form. She emphasized that physical punishment tends to occur in tandem with other methods like verbal threats, time-outs, or removal of privileges (Gershoff, 2002).

Additional insight on parents' use of physical punishment was gained from Gershoff's 2002 piece. She noted that parents' use of physical punishment frequently responds to their children's aggression, or child behaviors that threaten their own safety as well as others. However, she finds it ironic that parents use aggression (in the form of physical punishment) to correct aggression in their children. Another observation she made was that physical punishment was more likely to be used by parents to address repeated behaviors or infractions by children (Gershoff, 2002).

Why Physical Punishment is Not Recommended

Physical Punishment Violates Children's Human Rights

As physical punishment persists on a national and global scale, researchers, human rights groups, and international bodies are adamant that intentionally inflicting pain by hitting children is a form of violence, which violates the basic human rights of a child (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2013; Gershoff et al., 2017; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2017; Knox 2010). Freeman and Saunders (2014) articulated that violence is a common trend in asymmetric relationships as seen in master and slave, and heterosexual relationships, and that physical force has been used in these contexts. They noted that children have lacked rights for a long time.

The Convention on the Rights of a Child of 1989 has played a pivotal role around children's rights according to Freeman and Saunders (2014). This convention declares that the child has a right to freedom of expression, and the right to be treated with dignity and respect (United Nations, 1989). Violent acts against children are also condemned by the United Nations. This can be seen in Article 19 in the Convention on the Rights of a Child that states "children should be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence" (United Nations, 1989,

Article 19). The Convention on the Rights of a Child was further interpreted by the Committee on the Rights of a Child as leaving no room “for any level of legalized violence against children” (Committee on the Rights of a Child, 2006, Paragraph 4). While women and other adults are now legally protected from physical violence, researchers found it ironic that children, the most vulnerable members of the society, are not afforded this kind of human rights protection, hence their continued fight for change (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2010; Knox, 2010).

Negative Consequences of Physical Punishment

In making their case against physical punishment, scholars have discussed its harmful effects, where it is unequivocally described as doing more harm than good. Some of the harmful effects include mental health issues, revictimization as an adult, as well as increased aggression and delinquency in children (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2010; Knox, 2010; Lake et al., 2016). Physical punishment also sends the wrong message to children, and is consistently viewed as a poor disciplinary measure (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2013). Freeman and Saunders (2014) observed that hitting children teaches them that violence is a suitable tool for resolving differences, whereas communicating with the child teaches the child different skills. Along this line, Gershoff (2010) held that the force used in physical punishment is an external source to elicit compliance. This affects children’s ability to develop an internalized reason for desirable behavior. As such, they have no reason to behave when the external force is absent. Gershoff further emphasized that spanking teaches that “violence is sometimes a part of loving relationships” and that violence is a necessary act for those with power to achieve their desired outcomes (Gershoff, 2013, p. 185).

Additionally, Gershoff (2010) held that the physical force utilized in physical punishment causes a child to experience pain. Essentially, it is the pain that is being used as the punishment

and deterrent, noted Gershoff (2010). Usage of pain in this light can result in injury, since parents are often more physically powerful than children. In her 2002 article, Gershoff explained that the use of pain as a stimulus can erode the parent-child relationship, as the natural response is to escape a painful stimulus, which leads to avoidance of parents who are essentially dispensers of such stimuli (Gershoff, 2002).

Empirical Support for the Dangers of Physical Punishment

There is empirical evidence to support the potential harm of physical punishment. Gershoff (2002) performed meta-analyses of 88 studies with over 36,000 participants conducted over 62 years to investigate the relationship between physical punishment and several child behaviors and experiences. Her findings confirmed a strong association between physical punishment and increased adult criminal and antisocial behavior, worse child mental health, decreased quality of parent/child relationships, greater child delinquency and aggression, and increased risk of physical abuse.

To build on these meta-analyses, Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) conducted a new set of meta-analyses, with an additional 13 years of literature. Their research used 75 studies (obtained from peer reviewed articles) with 160, 927 participants. One of their main research questions addressed by the new meta-analyses is whether spanking would be associated with detrimental outcomes absent the use of studies with harsh or severe methods. The findings of their research confirmed that spanking was “significantly associated” with 13 of the 17 detrimental outcomes studied (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016, p. 5). Some of the childhood detrimental outcomes were: “low moral internalization, aggression, antisocial behavior...mental health problems, negative parent-child relationships” and “impaired cognitive ability.” In

adulthood, spanking was strongly linked to “adult antisocial behavior, adult mental health problems,” and “positive attitudes about spanking” (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016, p. 5).

Physical Punishment as a Risk Factor for Child Abuse

Although physical punishment and physical abuse may be viewed as distinct actions in certain countries or jurisdictions, research has suggested that there is an identifiable connection between the two, since what eventually turns into abuse started out as a corrective action. A 2001 review of physical abuse cases revealed that 69% of these cases resulted from disciplining attempts (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Freeman and Saunders further explained that many cases of physical punishment especially in young children and infants go unreported, as they are unlikely to share their experience, so it is difficult to get exact estimates. They concluded that there is a blurred line between physical punishment and child abuse, which can easily be crossed without a signal to alert parents (Freeman & Saunders, 2014).

In describing physical methods of disciplining, Knox (2010) noted that as spanking (one method) progresses, the actions of the adult intensify with harder hitting, which can cause physical injury to the child resulting in abuse. Child abuse, a public health issue, has been shown to have poor outcomes on a child’s mental health, cognitive development, and physical health, with effects lasting into adulthood (Fortson et al., 2016; Lake & Jamieson, 2016). Data from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) revealed that physical abuse was the second most common form of abuse (accounting for 18% of cases) after neglect in 2016 (HHS, 2018), which further highlights the gravity and implications of the link between physical punishment and child abuse.

Gershoff (2010) further held that more frequent use of physical punishment greatly increases the risk of physical abuse. Thus, she made the argument that there is undisputed

evidence that physical punishment and physical abuse are indistinct gradations of the same act. In her article, she noted that there is also a legal recognition of the connection between physical punishment and physical abuse in some parts of the United States. To support her stance, she cited a Nevada statute, which states “Excessive corporal punishment may constitute abuse or neglect. Excessive corporal punishment may result in physical or mental injury constituting abuse or neglect of a child under the provisions of this chapter” (Gershoff, 2010, p. 43).

Support for Physical Punishment

Religious Support for Physical Punishment

Despite the body of evidence holding that physical punishment is associated with negative outcomes, and is a risk factor for abuse (Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff, 2010; Gershoff, 2013; Knox, 2010), researchers have observed that some religious groups are ardent supporters of this method of discipline (Chaney, Skipper & Harvey, 2015; Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). Chaney et al. (2015) further informed that “over 80% of Americans self-identify with a religious [organization],” (p. 859) thus making religion an important construct in discussions on physical punishment.

To underscore the impact of religious factors on physical punishment, Ellison et al. (1993) studied conservative Protestants’ approval of this form of discipline. They found that this group’s disproportionate support for corporal punishment is rooted in the observance of biblical literalism, the view of humans as having a sinful nature, and an acceptance that sin should be rewarded with punishment. The role of the bible within this group has powerful implications, as Ellison et al. (1993) explained that conservative Protestants view the bible as the ultimate authoritative text that offers guidance for parenting, family organization, and human affairs

(1993, p. 132). In fact, biblical principles are treated by conservative Protestant writers as having greater precedence on child rearing than social research according to Ellison et al. (1993).

Ellison et al. (1993) analyzed data from the 1988 General Social Survey (GSS) in their study, and using the data, they developed a model that tested religious factors and support for corporal punishment. Their findings confirmed that conservative Protestants are two times as likely as other similarly situated individuals to support literal interpretation of the bible. This biblical literalism within conservative Protestants has a profound impact on their use of physical punishment. Their belief that all humans are born with sin supports their idea that all children are predisposed to selfish behavior, and are likely to be rebellious towards authority. Consequently, conservative Protestants hold that children should be shaped towards God's will: respectful to parents, conforming, and obedient. Thus, they find confirmation in scripture that the rod is necessary to achieve this (Ellison et al., 1993).

The family structure of conservative Protestants also has implications on their child-rearing practice. According to Ellison et al. (1993), this religious group observes a hierarchical structure in families, headed by God, with defined "superordinate and subordinate roles" (1993, p. 132). Some leading biblical doctrine emphasized by this group are scriptures commanding children to honor their parents, and parents' command to pass on "religious values to their children" (Ellison et al., 1993, p. 133). This hierarchical structure conflicts with the child-rearing principle of secular experts that promote democracy within the family unit according to Ellison et al. (1993). The force of religion further extends to how God is presented to children.

According to Ellison et al. (1993), conservative Protestants also use corporal punishment as a means of communicating a positive "spiritual lesson to children" (p. 134). In so doing, God is

represented as a dual frame through parents: nurturing and loving towards their children, and on the other hand, a force that exacts punishment for sin.

Chaney et al. (2015), other researchers that studied the impact of religion on corporal punishment, specifically examined black megachurches and attitudes toward this discipline form. The focal point of their article was the arrest of megachurch pastor, Dr. Creflo Dollar, for the alleged use of physical force and the physical abuse of his daughter back in 2012, which elicited intense public scrutiny and varied reactions. The researchers qualitatively analyzed over 3000 CNN online comments related to the incident, and one of the themes uncovered was “Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child” (p. 866). Proponents of this theme alluded to the scripture, and viewed physical punishment in a positive light.

Chaney et al.’s analysis of the online comments revealed that 11% of the respondents viewed corporal punishment favorably, and believed that it is beneficial to children. One of the supporters of the “spare the rod, spoil the child” doctrine remarked: “Children are mouthy creatures, regardless of the parents’ status in life. You better whip them before the police get to them and they might not be so loving” (Chaney et al., 2015, p. 866). A Creflo online supporter stated: “Beat her Creflo. Everybody gets spanking’s (*sic*)” (Chaney et al., 2015, p. 866).

The perspectives of these commenters highlight an important conflict around child-disciplining that exists today, as some still have strong acceptance for the use of physical punishment. While religion serves to guide moral behavior and human wellbeing, Chaney et al. (2015) held that religious beliefs can contribute to the tendency of abusive actions. The authors articulated that support for abusive physical force against children can be found in scriptures like “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die”

(Proverbs 23:13, King James Version) (Chaney et al., 2015, p. 860). When such scriptures are taken literally, this promotes the use of physical punishment.

Social-Scientific Research-Based Support for Physical Punishment

While most of the evidence presented earlier in this review have highlighted the dangers of physical punishment, not all researchers agree that physical punishment is harmful and ineffective as posited by Gershoff (2013). Larzelere (2000) explored the outcomes of non-abusive and customary physical punishment in his study, and had different conclusions. An interesting point he raised is that discussions on corporal punishment should consider child characteristics, how corporal punishment is used (whether it is severe or reasonable), and the subcultural context of its use. He argued that critics of corporal punishment fail to consider these nuances, and that the associated negative outcomes of physical punishment are primarily due to harsh and severe physical punishment.

For his research, Larzelere (2000) analyzed 38 studies on corporal punishment and studied the outcomes. One of the key criteria for his studies is that it utilized children whose average age when spanked was under 13 years. Some of the studies analyzed revealed that physical punishment was linked to beneficial outcomes like reduced fighting and enhanced parental affection. Of child characteristics, Larzelere (2000) found that child age affects the outcome of physical punishment, as his research uncovered that this form of discipline was more effective in children age 6 or under.

In terms of how physical punishment is administered, Larzelere (2000) held that “Child outcomes tended to be beneficial when physical punishment was used non-abusively, not too frequently, primarily as a back-up to milder discipline techniques, and flexibly” (p. 209). He observed that all 9 of the studies that used spanking as a backup for a milder technique had

beneficial outcomes. Essentially, Larzelere (2000) believed that strategy is key in the use of physical punishment. He posited that resorting to spanking quickly as the sole disciplining measure can lead to an increase in its frequency, which can cause detrimental outcomes. On the other hand, Larzelere noted that strategic use of spanking as a back-up to gentler measures, is more effective in the 2-6 age group (Larzelere, 2000).

Looking at the cultural context of physical punishment, Larzelere (2000) found that this factor has a significant bearing on child outcomes. He observed that two of his uncontrolled longitudinal studies found detrimental effects for European Americans, but neutral effects for African Americans. One of the studies also revealed beneficial outcomes in conservative Protestants where there was spanking for a short period of time. These results led Larzelere to conclude that the “ethnic and religious subcultural differences in the outcomes of spanking probably depend on how spanking is used and its normative acceptance for those subcultures” (2000, p. 210).

Larzelere (2000) also commented on the oft “unconditional [anti-spanking] viewpoint” which holds that spanking is wholly linked to negative outcomes, without considering factors like age, culture, or how spanking is administered. To challenge this perspective, Larzelere (2000) cautioned that the issue of spanking is complex, and anti-spanking advocates may be unintentionally forcing a set of values on a complex phenomenon. For example, he explained that non-physical disciplinary measures may work better for more verbal or wealthier parents as opposed to low socio-economic status parents.

In highlighting what he considered some of the characteristics of effective spanking, Larzelere (2000) presented spanking in an entirely different light, through somewhat gentler lens than other researchers. Some of the characteristics he mentioned of effective spanking were that

it is not too severe, done with parental control, administered during the early stages of childhood, used with reasoning, done privately, and used flexibly.

Research Processes

The issue of physical punishment has been studied in varied ways. Some researchers have used qualitative data to achieve a first-hand account from the major players involved (Freeman & Saunders, 2014, Chaney et al., 2015) while others have relied on quantitative data from surveys and questionnaires (Afifi et al., 2017; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). This study will use secondary quantitative data that has already been analyzed by the primary researchers. The data has been organized in tables and charts which will allow for smooth analysis. The “Research Design,” Chapter 3, will provide a more in-depth description of some of the statistical methods that the primary researchers have used. The current researcher will further study and analyze the data, and will then draw conclusions and make recommendations on devising legislation on outlawing the use of physical punishment.

Summary

An understanding of violence against children requires looking at social policies that dictate different rights for children. Although children may no longer be viewed as property, this legacy has not died (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). The conflicting research theories above, coupled with the religious foundational support for physical punishment, leads to the question of whether the beneficial outcomes of physical punishment highlighted by Larzelere (2000), outweighs its numerous associated negative outcomes, and its risk factor for child abuse. There is also the question of whether state interests in child welfare should supersede religious interests in child-rearing. Devising a policy on physical punishment will require carefully considering the

evidence presented, and establishing if the demonstrated risk of harm to a child and associated negative outcomes, warrants the use of physical punishment, even at early stages.

Fundamentally, what remains critical, and should be at the forefront of these conversations is the need to give children the same rights as other groups: protection from all forms of physical violence. The U.S. has made progress in outlawing the use physical force on women and other adult groups, yet children, the most vulnerable members of society are not universally guaranteed this protection. Thus, the issue of human rights should be at the core of the discussions on physical punishment, and future policy change.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

The proposed study was designed to acquire a better understanding of physical punishment, examine its association with detrimental outcomes including child abuse, and to propose a policy to outlaw the use of physical punishment as a method of discipline in the United States. This chapter will describe the data that will be collected for this study, the rationale for its use, and how it will be analyzed. The researcher will gather secondary quantitative data on the subject from government databases, child-research organizations, as well as from scholarly research. The data from the peer-reviewed articles include results of several meta-analyses which have already been analyzed by statistical methods. The researcher will further study this data and make deductions based on associations between physical punishment and the constructs/outcomes under examination. Government data will be obtained from the Children's Bureau in the Division of Health and Human Services (HHS). Data from the HHS is of interest to the researcher as it is the government department that is concerned with enhancing and protecting the "health and well-being of all Americans" (HHS, n.d.). This data has been sorted into distinct categories and tabulated, which lends it to easy analysis. All the data for this study will be obtained electronically.

Description of Data

National data will be drawn from the "Child Maltreatment 2016 Report" published by the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families, one of the divisions within the HHS. Within the Children's Bureau is the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System that all states report to. This data is then analyzed and shared in an annual report (HHS, 2016). Specifically, the researcher will use a table titled "Maltreatment Type Combinations, 2016." This

report is selected for this study, as it contains national statistics on child maltreatment and provides a snapshot of the prevalence of physical abuse as a form of child maltreatment.

Additional data for this research will be extracted from peer reviewed journal articles on physical punishment. This is secondary data that has already been analyzed by scholars and presented in a tabular format, making it coherent and organized for further analysis. From these tables, trends can be obtained, and conclusions can be drawn on the frequencies of the specific constructs tested as they relate to physical punishment. The scholars of these journal articles employed a correlational research design method for their studies. Lunenberg and Irby (2007) explained that correlational research is “grounded in interactions of one variable to another” (p. 35) and if there is a relationship established between two or more variables, it means that the variables are correlated. Lunenberg and Irby (2007) further articulated that correlation research does not necessarily mean “causality” (p. 35).

One of the tables used is from Gershoff’s 2002 meta-analyses. According to McNabb (2008), meta-analyses are used to “summarize and compare the results of several different studies” and researchers can use them to get the ““big picture”” (p. 379). The table of interest shows the “composite mean weighted effect sizes for different child constructs” such as aggression, mental health, and child abuse. In her research, Gershoff (2002) first used database searches to obtain articles that studied the relationships between physical punishment and child behaviors and experiences that were available through June 2001. One of Gershoff’s goal was to investigate the effects of physical punishment on 11 childhood constructs. She conducted separate meta-analyses of 88 studies using the DSTAT software, for each of the dependent variables she identified. A standard effect size, d , was found for each target study, then combined into a mean weighted effect size, which was then tested for significance (Gershoff, 2002).

Afifi et al.'s 2017 article titled "Spanking and Adult Mental Health Impairment: The Case for the Designation of Spanking as an Adverse Childhood Experience" will also serve as a source of data for the current study. The table adopted shows "The associations of spanking and Physical/Emotional abuse with poor mental health outcomes." For their study, the authors obtained secondary data from Wave II of the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study (N = 8316, ages 19–97 years; response rate—65%). The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics and unadjusted odd ratios to examine the relationship between spanking and sociodemographic factors like educational attainment, race, and marital status. The researcher will use this data to show how spanking and physical/emotional abuse are related to the following adult mental health impairments: depressed affect, suicide attempts, moderate to heavy drinking, and drug use.

Additional data for this study will be retrieved from Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor's 2016 meta-analyses. A table showing the "Summary of spanking meta-analyses by outcome" will be used. To acquire the data for the meta-analyses, Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor selected 75 studies from peer-reviewed articles all meeting strict criteria, including spanking that used non-injurious corporal punishment (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). The effect sizes were independently calculated by each of the article's authors. Cohen's formula for d was then used to transform the effect sizes into "standardized mean difference effect sizes to allow combination across effect sizes" (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016, p. 4). These effect sizes were then combined into a meta-analysis.

Other data will be retrieved from a study conducted by Merrick et al. (2017) for their article: "Unpacking the impact of adverse childhood experiences on mental health." They obtained data from Wave II of the CDC-Kaiser Ace Study done in 1997 (similar to Afifi et al.

(2017) above) in which adult participants ($n = 7465$) completed surveys which questioned their exposure to several ACEs (adverse childhood experiences). The researchers examined the association between 11 ACEs including spanking, and 4 mental health outcomes: drug use, moderate to heavy drinking, suicide attempt, and depressed affect.

Data on attitudes towards spanking from “Child Trends” (a children-research organization) will also be used for this study. A graph showing the percentage of males and females (18-65) who agreed with the use of spanking through the years 1986-2016 will be selected for this study. This graph is of interest, since studying the percentage of people that have a positive attitude towards physical punishment will guide the structure of the policy recommendations around changing positive perceptions on physical punishment.

Data Analysis

With regard to the data from the peer reviewed articles, the primary analysis of this data was already done by the researchers using statistical methods as described above. The data was then presented in a tabular format for future use and study by other researchers. From these charts and tables, the researcher will further scrutinize the results and look for relationships and frequencies between physical punishment and the constructs/outcomes that are studied. For example, the table used from Afifi et al.’s 2017 study shows “The associations of spanking and Physical/Emotional abuse with poor mental health outcomes,” so by using the data in this table, the researcher will be able to examine those associations using the numerical values assigned to the adjusted odd ratios of the predictors. To analyze the data in Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor’s 2016 meta-analyses, the researcher will study the effect size d , using the authors’ guide on what range corresponds to a significant association between spanking and the constructs studied.

How Data Tests Hypothesis

From the data, the relationship between physical punishment and the constructs examined will show the risk that exists for the independent variable (physical punishment) and all the dependent variables (outcomes or constructs studied). These dependent variables include physical abuse, mental health issues, delinquency, suicide, drug use, revictimization, quality of the parent-child relationship, as well as adult abuse of own child or spouse. One hypothesis for this study is that spanking is harmful and is associated with negative outcomes, so since the data was analyzed initially, further analyzing the values in the tables from the peer reviewed articles will help to prove or disprove this hypothesis. The researcher's use of a table from the HHS showing the total number of each type of child maltreatment, and the combinations of these maltreatments in 2016, will reveal the frequency of physical abuse as a form of child maltreatment. Coupled with the hypothesis of physical punishment being associated with physical abuse, this will highlight the gravity of physical punishment as a form of discipline.

Strengths

The present study utilizes secondary data on physical punishment, thus the researcher will first share some of the strengths expressed by the original scholars. According to Afifi et al. (2017), one strength of their research is that the findings from their study contributed to the body of evidence that spanking can be harmful, and supports their case for it to be made an adverse childhood experience. They further noted that the data used was of a high quality and was obtained from a large sample size with a high response rate. Four different ACEs were assessed, which helped to advance knowledge on the subject. Likewise, the data from Gershoff's 2002 meta-analysis was obtained from 88 different studies on corporal punishment conducted over the course of 62 years, with a total of 36,309 participants (Gershoff, 2002). Studies with a large

number of participants lend to more authority and a greater degree of extrapolation. McNabb further held that a meta-analysis “is an excellent way of establishing the state of research findings on a subject” (2008, p. 379).

To settle much of the debate on corporal punishment, Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) conducted a new set of meta-analyses, with 13 more years of literature than the earlier 2002 meta-analyses. The new meta-analyses answered the research question of whether spanking would be associated with detrimental outcomes absent the use of studies with harsh or severe methods. The new research uncovered that spanking was “significantly associated” with 13 of the 17 detrimental outcomes studied (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016, p. 5). The recent 2016 research used 75 studies with 160, 927 participants. Thus, a strength of their study is that it utilizes data from a large number of participants. With their method of excluding spanking that utilized severe or harsh methods, they were still able to prove that “regular” spanking is associated with a number of detrimental outcomes in children and adults (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).

Another strength of this methodology, is that the current researcher was able to obtain findings from large datasets which exceeds how much she would be able to obtain on her own. The use of secondary data from government sources gave the current researcher access to national data on substantiated cases of child maltreatment submitted by each state, that the researcher typically would not be able to obtain.

Weaknesses

Since the present study utilizes secondary data on physical punishment, the researcher will first identify limitations expressed by the original researchers. Afifi et al. (2017) noted that the data they obtained for their study is “cross-sectional and retrospective” and does not establish

a causative linkage (Afifi et al., 2017, p. 29). Gershoff (2002), had a similar limitation for her research and noted that “Causal conclusions about the effects of parenting on children are hampered by the fact that most research on parenting and its effects on children is correlational” (p. 565). She added that because the act of physical punishment is typically unseen, researchers studying corporal punishment need to explore more effective ways to determine causation. Since the outcomes are correlational, Gershoff (2002) added that these designs “cannot rule out the possibility that child behavior problems elicit corporal punishment more than corporal punishment causes such problems” (Gershoff, 2002, p.565).

In Gershoff’s 2002 analysis, she also expressed that the lack of a standard definition of corporal punishment was a limitation of her study. She explained that the studies used in the meta-analyses did not elicit parents’ meaning of corporal punishment. Rather, parents were given a definition of corporal punishment to determine which behavior falls within that scope.

Gershoff (2002) further noted that another limitation of her study is the lack of a standard measurement of what constitutes corporal punishment. She emphasized that “Research is needed that assesses exactly how hard parents are hitting their children and whether varying degrees of force have varying effects on children” (p. 565). Additionally, she noted that it is difficult to assess the use of corporal punishment, as it is rarely used in isolation; it is often used in conjunction with other disciplining techniques such as a verbal warning.

Another weakness of this methodology is that the current researcher lacks control over the quality and types of data collected. Since the researcher had no involvement in the selection of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques, there is a strong reliance on the original scholars that the data was accurately analyzed, and that they utilized properly collected data for their studies.

Finally, while the child maltreatment report from the HHS has data on physical abuse, it lacked data on cases of physical punishment, and nationwide statistics of physical punishment incidents that resulted in physical abuse. Having this kind of breakdown published by government agencies/departments could show how invested the country is on physical punishment on a whole. If this data is measured and published by public health agencies like the HHS, it could be used as a greater force to rally policy makers.

Summary

This study utilized secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles, government databases, and child-research organizations. The data from the peer-reviewed articles was analyzed using statistical methods by the primary researchers. One of the strengths of the study is that it used data from meta-analyses with a large number of participants, which lends it to a greater degree of extrapolation. A common weakness highlighted by the some of the primary researchers is that the associated outcomes from physical punishment are correlational rather than causative.

Chapter 4: Results

As this study utilized secondary analyzed data, the researcher will present those findings highlighting relationships, patterns, and trends. Table 1 was obtained from a peer-reviewed journal article by Afifi et al. (2017). It shows “The associations of spanking and physical/emotional abuse with poor mental health outcomes.” As noted in the “Research Design,” (Chapter 3) data for this table was acquired from Wave II of the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study (N = 8316, ages 19–97 years; response rate—65%). This data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics and unadjusted odd ratios to examine the relationship between spanking and sociodemographic factors like educational attainment, race, and marital status (Afifi et al., 2017). This was followed by the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to study the “empirical grouping of the spanking item” with “the factor of physical/emotional abuse comprised” of the following four ACEs: depressed affect, lifetime suicide attempt, moderate to heavy drinking, and drug use (Afifi et al. 2017, p. 27). Models 1 and 2 of the Table 1 indicates that both spanking and physical/emotional abuse were individually associated with the afore-mentioned four ACEs.

Table 2 shows the “Adjusted bivariate associations between self-reported mental health outcomes and ACEs” and was obtained from Merrick et al.’s 2017 article. As with the data in Table 1, this data was acquired from Wave II of the CDC-Kaiser Ace Study done in 1997. For this study, adult participants (n = 7465) completed surveys which questioned their exposure to several ACEs. The researchers used multiple logistic regression modelling to examine the association between 11 ACEs including spanking, and the following four mental health outcomes: drug use, moderate to heavy drinking, suicide attempt, and depressed affect. This statistical analysis was done while adjusting for “age, marriage, educational attainment, race and gender” (Merrick et al., 2017, p. 13). For drug use during adulthood, statistically significant odd

ratios ranged from 1.39 to 1.88, and with the exception of physical neglect, all the ACEs were significantly associated with drug use during adulthood. In terms of moderate to heavy drinking, significant odd ratios ranged from 1.33 to 1.93, and spanking with an odd ratio of 1.40, fell within this range. For depressed affect during adulthood, significant odd ratios ranged from 1.24 to 1.98 and spanking also fell within this range with a value of 1.24.

The “Composite Mean Weighted Effect Sizes for Child Constructs” is captured in Table 3. This table was extracted from Gershoff’s earlier 2002 meta-analyses of 88 studies conducted over 62 years. The data for these studies were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles that examined the relationships between physical punishment and several childhood behaviors and experiences. There was a total of 36, 309 participants. The standard effect size d was later found, and converted to a “composite mean weighted effect size” (Gershoff, 2002, p. 544) and tested for significance. Significance was determined if the effect size’s “95% confidence interval does not include 0.00 (Gershoff, 2002, p. 544).” These initial meta-analyses indicated that physical punishment was associated with 10 undesirable constructs including moral internalization, aggression, delinquent and antisocial behavior (all measured in childhood). In adulthood, physical punishment was found to be associated with criminal and antisocial behavior, as well as adult abuse of own spouse. At the time of this research in 2002, physical punishment was found to be associated with one desirable behavior, immediate compliance (Gershoff, 2002).

Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor built on these 2002 meta-analyses by conducting another set of meta-analyses in 2016. This data is reflected in Table 4: “Summary of spanking meta-analyses by outcome.” Their 2016 research consists of 75 studies with 160, 927 children. Like the 2002 meta-analyses, the studies for the 2016 meta-analyses were also obtained from peer-review journal articles, but represented an additional 13 years of research. The effect sizes for these

studies were achieved using Cohen's formula for d . Significant effect sizes ranged from 0.15-0.64. The results in Table 4 indicated that spanking was not found to be associated with any desirable behaviors. Instead, in children, spanking was significantly associated with undesirable outcomes like negative parent-child relationship and impaired cognitive ability, while in adults, spanking was found to be associated with adult mental health problems and adult anti-social behavior.

Table 5 presents a compilation of "Maltreatment Type Combination 2016." This table published by the HHS, gives a breakdown of the occurrence of the different forms of child maltreatment in 2016. The data shows that physical abuse was the second most prevalent form of child maltreatment after neglect, with 74, 548 cases. According to the table, physical abuse also occurred in tandem with other types of maltreatment like neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Data for this table was submitted by states to the "National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System." The data was then compiled, analyzed, and shared in the HHS' annual "Child Maltreatment Report."

Figure 1 is a chart obtained from the Child Trends organization, and it highlights positive attitudes of males and females towards physical punishment over a 30-year period (1986-2016). The chart reveals that over the 30-year period, there has been a decrease in both the percentage men and women that agree with the use of physical punishment. In women, there was roughly a 20 percent decline from 84% in 1986 to 76 % in 2016. In men, although there has been an overall decrease in approval for physical punishment over the 30-year period, the percentage has remained relatively steady since 1995 with a 78% approval, and a 76% approval in 2016. Data for this chart was obtained from the General Social Survey (Child Trends, 2018).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

By analyzing data from Table 1 which shows “The associations of spanking and physical/emotional abuse with poor mental health outcomes,” spanking was found to be “significantly associated” with three of the four mental health outcomes studied: an increased chance of suicide attempts, moderate to heavy drinking, and drug use as an adult (Afifi et al. 2017, p. 28). Afifi et al. (2017) noted that this relationship exceeded the association of physical/emotional abuse with these constructs, and they held that this data further confirms research indicating that spanking and physical abuse are varying degrees of violence against children. The current researcher believes that the association found between spanking and the mental health outcomes indicates that eliminating spanking could also see a reduction in cases of suicide attempts, substance abuse, and alcohol addiction. Afifi et al. (2017) concluded that since spanking is similarly linked to mental health outcomes like physical/emotional abuse, it should be designated as an adverse childhood experience (ACE). Making it an ACE could give it the attention it deserves and help in the push for a policy change.

Merrick et al.’s (2017) research on spanking provided data which is outlined in Table 2. This table shows the “Adjusted bivariate associations between self-reported mental health outcomes and ACEs.” Based on the adjusted odd ratios for spanking as seen in Table 2 and described earlier in the results chapter, it was found to be significantly associated with drug use, moderate to heavy drinking, and depressed affect during adulthood. Merrick et al. (2017) concluded these findings bolsters support for widening the categories of ACEs to include spanking. However, Merrick et al. (2017) further explained that “after adjusting for other forms of child maltreatment,” (p. 16) spanking remained significantly associated with drug use and

moderate to heavy drinking, but not with the other outcomes measured. This, Merrick et al. (2017) noted, could be due to spanking's association with other ACE items like physical abuse. Fundamentally, this study highlights that the link between spanking and negative outcomes like drug use and moderate to heavy drinking, has implications that eliminating the use of spanking could contribute to reductions in the occurrence of drug use and alcohol usage. Thus, tackling these constructs from the earliest contributory stages, should be considered when addressing these chronic problems.

In reviewing Gershoff's 2002 meta-analyses, Table 3 which shows the "Composite Mean Weighted Effect Sizes for Child Constructs" was further analyzed. In this study, all the effect sizes were significant, and physical punishment was found to be significantly associated with all 11 of the constructs studied including undesirable outcomes like child aggression, both child and adult mental health issues, delinquent and antisocial behavior, as well as increased risk of childhood physical abuse. Childhood physical abuse had the second highest effect size of 0.69, which is considered as medium-large (Gershoff, 2002). Gershoff (2002) held that these findings confirmed researchers' fear of the close link between physical punishment and physical abuse. Since most of the physical abuse cases started out as discipline attempts (Freeman & Saunders, 2014), successfully fighting child abuse will require devising policy outlawing the use of physical punishment as a form of discipline, which supports the goal of this policy memorandum to enact appropriate legislation against physical punishment.

In Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor's 2016 study for which the data is captured in Table 4, they noted that the statistically significant mean effect sizes ranged from 0.15-0.64 with a mean effect size of 0.33. Studying Table 4 indicates that spanking had a significant association with 13 of the 17 detrimental child outcomes studied, which include child aggression, child antisocial

behavior, child mental health problems, impaired cognitive ability, and low self-esteem. During adulthood, spanking was significantly associated with adult anti-social behavior, adult mental health problems, victim of physical abuse, and adult support for physical punishment (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). The researchers concluded that the finding that adults who experienced spanking as children approve its use, could be due to an intergenerational transfer of positive attitudes towards spanking, or adults “selectively remembering” past experiences to justify current perceptions (p. 11). These findings highlight the gravity of the use of spanking in that it is also associated with effects manifesting in adulthood. Not only can spanking be detrimental to the well-being of children; adults with a history of childhood spanking can also suffer in areas like their mental well-being. The current researcher believes that outlawing the use of spanking can see marked changes in the plethora of mental health cases in the U.S., as the research has proven there is a significant association between the two.

Data from the HHS captured in Table 5, revealed that in 2016, there were close to 700,000 cases of child maltreatment in the United States. Of those cases, there were approximately 74,548 victims of physical abuse. Physical abuse was the second most prevalent form of child maltreatment after neglect. These figures are concerning, as the literature presented earlier in this paper explained that there is an identifiable connection between physical punishment and child physical abuse. Some studies have revealed that 69% of physical abuse cases started out as disciplining attempts (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Thus, there is a high probability that some of these reported physical abuse cases were due to physical punishment. As this paper will explain later in the recommendations section, child abuse is a very detrimental and costly public health issue, and the CDC has released a technical package with guidance on addressing this issue.

The organization Child Trends, has studied patterns in attitudes towards spanking over a 30-year period from 1986-2016. Figure 1 shows the percentage of males and females who agreed or strongly agreed that spanking is sometimes necessary, with respondents ranging from ages 18-65. Over the period measured, Child Trends noted there has been roughly a 20% decline in the percentage of women who believed in occasional spanking. This corresponds to a decline from 82% in 1986, to 66% in 2016. On the other hand, a different pattern was observed in the men surveyed. In 1986, 84% of the males approved of spanking, which declined to 76% in 2016. This represented an overall 10% decline. The data shows that strong emphasis should be placed on changing males' positive approval of spanking. Men be may less verbal than women in child disciplining, thus may be more likely to resort to physical punishment in lieu of trying milder discipline attempts. Thus, this presents a critical opportunity to educate them on safer methods. The overall decline in approval for spanking in both sexes over the 30-year period depicts a progressive mindset in childrearing, and a gradual shift from archaic discipline methods. This is a sign of hope for a comprehensive change in positive attitudes on spanking.

Recommendations

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child held that corporal punishment “is a form of legalized violence against children” (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2007, para. 18), and Article 19 of the UNCR, states that “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment....” (United Nations, 1989). The foregoing makes it clear that violence against children in the form of physical punishment should not be condoned or supported, and calls for legislative intervention to address

this violence. This section will elaborate on the need for legislation condemning physical violence against children, and safer interventions in light of this mandate from the UN.

Violence Against Women Act

The U.S. has made progress in enacting legislation to combat violence against several groups. According to the Congressional Research Service, “public concern over violence against women prompted the original passage of the [Violence Against Women Act] (VAWA)” (Congressional Research Service, 2015). They noted that in the 1970s, grassroots organizations sought a change in the attitudes on violence against women. Then Senator Joe Biden championed the Violence Against Women Act and introduced it in 1990. This Act was later passed into law in 1994, with the goal of changing attitudes toward domestic violence, raising awareness on domestic violence, improving victim services, and restructuring the criminal justice response.

Biden in a speech about the VAWA, noted that “America as a nation has for too long failed to grasp either the scope or the seriousness of violence against women.” According to Biden, violent acts and crimes against women were not treated with the alacrity that it deserved. He further emphasized that a key part of addressing violence against women is confronting and condemning attitudes that support it. In highlighting the gravity of the situation on violence against women, Biden noted that “in 1990, one third of all female homicide victims died at the hands of a husband or boyfriend” (Biden, 1993, p. 1059).

The VAWA is a federal legislation and according to Biden, is the first to “address the problem of violence against women as a whole” (Biden, 1993, p. 1060). The passage of this federal law represents a national position to tackle the public health issue of violence against women. Similarly, legislation should be enacted to protect society’s most vulnerable

individuals—children, from all forms of violence, which will help to change positive attitudes and support for this discipline practice.

American Association of Pediatrics Policy Statement

In as recent as November of this year, 2018, we have seen that professional bodies in the U.S. are strongly invested in protecting the rights of children, and ending physical violence against them. The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) just released a Policy Statement titled “Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children.” By providing a number of adverse outcomes from new research, the AAP advised against the use of physical punishment, and offered safer methods of discipline. Some of the harmful outcomes of constant exposure to severe physical punishment include physiological brain changes in the participants studied, where the subjects had “a reduced prefrontal cortical gray matter volume and performance IQ” (Sege & Siegel, 2018, p. 4). In the Policy Statement, Sege and Siegel (2018) articulated that pediatricians serve as powerful sources of information and guidance for parents in areas like child development as well as behavior control. Thus, with the new research findings, pediatricians and health care providers can be powerful tools to educate parents, and change parents’ perspective on the use of physical punishment.

The literature and the data presented in chapters two and four highlight the association between physical punishment (legalized violence against children) and numerous detrimental outcomes including child physical abuse. Child abuse is quite costly to the United States, with an estimated total lifetime cost of \$124 billion each year (CDC, 2016). Since there is an identifiable connection between physical punishment and child abuse as demonstrated earlier, outlawing physical punishment could result in significant reductions in the number of child abuse cases, a decrease in the financial burden of child abuse, and a reduction in the associated detrimental

outcomes of physical punishment. While professional medical organizations like the AAP have solidified their stance against physical punishment, our government needs to show this same level of commitment and enact legislation against physical punishment. It is the goal of this policy memorandum to present evidence that will reach and influence those in a position to institute laws that will condemn violence against children.

Promising Intervention Strategies

Outlawing physical punishment will therefore call for safer intervention methods which will now be discussed. Knox (2010) expressed that many adults are unaware of alternative intervention strategies, so the act of physical violence against children persists. She offered non-violent alternatives like parent education and the implementation of campaigns that “reduce or eliminate social sanctions for hitting children” (p. 105). She also advocated for equipping the broader audience like health care providers and religious leaders with the tools to address physical punishment with parents.

Gershoff et al. (2017) articulated that physical punishment can cause undesirable outcomes in children, which works counterproductive to the very action that it is intended to correct, as it is an ineffective strategy that threatens children’s safety and well-being. Guided by this argument, they proposed a number of alternative intervention strategies aimed at preventing physical punishment primarily by changing parents’ attitudes. Their discussion was centered on three main levels of intervention: indicated intervention programs, selective prevention programs, and universal prevention programs. They explained that indicated interventions provide the most individualized strategy and are geared towards those at the highest risks of offending, like parents who have already physically abused their children. This level offers intensive services and is typically the costliest. Within this intervention level is a program called

the “Nurturing Parenting Program” (NPP) that deals with building “nurturing parenting skills” and is significantly focused on changing parents’ belief on physical discipline. Studies of NPP have found a reduced approval for physical punishment in participants (p.11).

Of selective intervention programs, the researchers explained that these programs “target subpopulations at particular risk for physical punishment” (Gershoff, 2017, p. 13). This includes all parents, pre-parents, and professionals who work with families. Of pre-parents, Gershoff et al. (2017) argued that it may be difficult to change set behavioral patterns, so this group is targeted through education with the goal of changing favorable views on physical punishment.

The last level of intervention proposed is universal prevention programs. Universal programs target the larger population (all adults and children) and reach a broader audience than the other levels. Within this level, one suggestion made was the use of public education campaigns that utilize the media, internet, billboards, and posters to showcase messages against physical punishment. Gershoff et al. (2017) acknowledged that the strategies presented are not exhaustive and further implored researchers to extend their lens beyond the family to other avenues when devising prevention strategies.

To reduce prevalence within a public health framework, Prinz (2016) expressed the importance of reach. He concluded that reach can be achieved by improving access to parenting interventions. Reach can also be increased through different delivery options like in-home visits, community center settings or primary care settings. Prinz (2016) further observed that stigmas can act as barriers to the uptake of these strategies, hence it is essential to reduce stigma, and normalize participation in parenting intervention programs.

Other researchers have offered their insights on how prevention can be approached. In discussing the prevention of violence against children, Lake and Jamieson (2016) advocated for a

child right's approach, and focused primarily on how health care professionals can intervene. Of the latter, they provided strategies that can foster children's participation, like building trust with children, encouraging them to communicate with providers, as well as listening carefully and taking children seriously. Lake and Jamieson (2016) also noted that supporting caregivers of young children through early intervention is instrumental and can help to break the cycle of violence. According to these researchers, healthcare professionals can provide interventions before a child is born, like being supportive in lieu of being judgmental, screening mothers for mental health issues and substance abuse, and helping pregnant women access services. After the child is born, additional strategies for health professionals offered by Lake and Jamieson (2016)) include showing an interest in how mothers are doing, being aware of signals of maternal depression, connecting mothers to social services, and encouraging participation of fathers in the child's life.

CDC's Role in Prevention

As demonstrated earlier, there is an association between physical punishment and child abuse, and Freeman and Saunders (2014) have argued that child abuse cannot be conquered if physical punishment remains legal. According to the CDC, 1 in 4 children have experienced child abuse (CDC, 2016). In recognizing child abuse as a public health crisis, the CDC has developed a technical package with strategies to address this issue (Fortson et al., 2016). The first strategy proposed is to "Strengthen Economic Support for Families" (Fortson et al., 2016, p. 13). The CDC believes that strengthening financial security can lessen the practice of child abuse and neglect since parents will be better equipped to provide basic needs like clothing, shelter, and medical care. This strategy can be achieved through federal and state programs like child

support, tax credits, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, affordable housing, and subsidized childcare.

The CDC is also engaged in the debate on physical punishment, and has recognized its link to child abuse. Thus, another strategy they proposed is to “Change Social Norms to Support Parents and Positive Parenting” (Fortson et al., 2016, p. 17). The CDC explained that the social norm around disciplining children is critical to the discussion of child abuse prevention. This strategy will utilize “public engagements and educational campaigns,” as well as “legislative approaches to reduce corporal punishment” which has the potential to reduce its reported use (Fortson et al., 2016, p. 17). The CDC further studied some European countries for supporting evidence on this strategy, noting that higher rates of corporal punishment were seen in countries where it is still legal, compared to those countries where it is banned. There was also a lower acceptance of corporal punishment in countries with a ban.

Another strategy proposed by the CDC is to enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development. They held that parents with poor parenting skills have more challenges with providing stable and nurturing relationships for their children. Approaches used to enhance parenting skills include home visitation programs that provide training and support to families, as well as training and educating parents in clinical settings.

In their technical package, the CDC further described the role of sector involvement, noting that child abuse touches many sectors such as social services, health services, housing, justice, and youth-serving organizations. The CDC believes that these sectors can work to prevent child abuse and neglect through their reach and impact by providing core protective elements (Fortson et al., 2016).

Summary

This current climate represents a significant time in our nation's history where voices are no longer silenced as several issues are being brought to the limelight. We see this with the "Me Too" movement, where numerous individuals have spoken out against specific forms of violation (Me Too, n.d.) and in the ongoing fight to restore humanity to children as they are separated from their parents at the borders (Kraft, 2018). On the federal level, women are now recognized and protected through the Violence Against Women Act (Congressional Research Service, 2015). Additionally, the AAP just released a Policy Statement strongly advising against the use of physical punishment (Sege & Siegel, 2018).

The foregoing chapters have presented evidence on the dangers of physical punishment like its association with child abuse, mental health issues, and negative-parent child relationships. This research has also highlighted alternative forms of intervention that will obviate the need for physical methods of discipline, such as addressing the broader issues like poverty, educating parents, and supporting young mothers. A huge challenge with addressing the problem of physical punishment is changing entrenched social and religious beliefs around child-rearing. Thus, a monumental shift in positive attitudes towards physical punishment is required, and will foster enactment of new legislation.

If there is ever a time to devise legislation banning the use of physical violence against children, it is now. Successful institution of a U.S. policy outlawing physical punishment will therefore require a coordinated effort among families, communities, religious groups, and our leaders. It is time to restore dignity to children and ensure that their basic human rights are protected. Indeed, it is time to stop hitting our children.

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Appendix A

Tables

Table 1- The associations of spanking and Physical/Emotional abuse with poor mental health outcomes.

Table 3

The associations of spanking and Physical/Emotional abuse with poor mental health outcomes.

Mental Health Outcome	Predictor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		AOR	CI _{95%}	AOR	CI _{95%}	AOR	CI _{95%}
Depressed Affect	Spanking	1.25	1.11, 1.42	–	–	1.00	0.88, 1.15
	Physical/Emotional Abuse	–	–	1.23	1.18, 1.28	1.23	1.18, 1.29
Suicide Attempt (lifetime)	Spanking	2.27	1.73, 3.00	–	–	1.37	1.02, 1.86
	Physical/Emotional Abuse	–	–	1.57	1.45, 1.70	1.51	1.38, 1.65
Moderate to Heavy Drinking ¹ (lifetime)	Spanking	1.38	1.22, 1.58	–	–	1.23	1.07, 1.41
	Physical/Emotional Abuse	–	–	1.16	1.11, 1.21	1.13	1.08, 1.19
Drug Use (lifetime)	Spanking	1.65	1.44, 1.89	–	–	1.32	1.14, 1.52
	Physical/Emotional Abuse	–	–	1.26	1.21, 1.32	1.22	1.17, 1.28

Note: CI = Confidence Interval; Model 1 = logistic regression model with spanking as a predictor; Model 2 = logistic regression model with Physical/Emotional abuse as a predictor; Model 3 = full logistic model with both spanking and emotional abuse; AOR = odds ratios adjusted for education, ethnicity, sex, age, and marital status; ¹ Threshold for moderate to heavy drinking varied by gender; males = 14 or more drinks per week; female = 7 or more drinks per week.

(Source – Afifi et al. 2017)

Table 2 - Adjusted bivariate associations between self-reported mental health outcomes and ACEs.

Table 2

Adjusted bivariate associations between self-reported mental health outcomes and ACEs.

	Self-reported Mental Health Outcome							
	Drug Use (lifetime) ^a		Moderate to Heavy Drinking (past 12 months) ^b		Suicide Attempt (lifetime) ^a		Depressed Affect (past 12 months) ^a	
	OR _{adj}	CI _{95%}	OR _{adj}	CI _{95%}	OR _{adj}	CI _{95%}	OR _{adj}	CI _{95%}
ACE Exposure	1.75	1.49, 2.04	1.52	1.29, 1.78	3.63	2.78, 4.74	1.44	1.24, 1.67
Sexual Abuse	1.88	1.55, 2.28	1.46	1.15, 1.83	5.59	4.22, 7.37	1.90	1.57, 2.30
Emotional Abuse	1.75	1.51, 2.01	1.48	1.27, 1.72	2.89	2.22, 3.77	1.67	1.45, 1.92
Physical Abuse	1.20	0.95, 1.51	1.54	1.23, 1.92	3.73	2.71, 5.09	1.34	1.09, 1.65
Physical neglect	1.73	1.45, 2.05	1.39	1.15, 1.68	4.11	3.13, 5.39	1.84	1.56, 2.16
Emotional neglect	1.39	1.15, 1.67	1.34	1.08, 1.64	2.51	1.86, 3.37	1.33	1.10, 1.59
Mother treated violently	1.76	1.51, 2.06	1.33	1.12, 1.57	5.42	4.13, 7.15	1.98	1.70, 2.29
Household mental illness	1.57	1.22, 2.02	1.33	0.99, 1.77	2.93	2.02, 4.16	1.17	0.90, 1.50
Incarcerated household member	1.82	1.59, 2.10	1.93	1.66, 2.25	2.26	1.72, 2.96	1.50	1.30, 1.72
Household substance abuse	1.47	1.27, 1.70	1.14	0.96, 1.34	1.72	1.30, 2.26	1.25	1.08, 1.45
Parental separation/divorce	1.63	1.42, 1.88	1.40	1.22, 1.61	2.20	1.65, 2.97	1.24	1.08, 1.41
Spanking								

^a Adjustment factors included in the model: age, race, sex, educational attainment, and marital status.^b Adjustment factors included in the model: age, race, educational attainment, and marital status (note: heavy drinking status is based upon the gender of the respondent and therefore sex was omitted from the model).

(Source: Merrick et al. 2017)

Table 3 - Composite Mean Weighted Effect Sizes for Child Constructs

Table 4

Composite Mean Weighted Effect Sizes for Child Constructs

Construct	d_+	95% CI	Studies (N)	Participants (N)	Construct association ^a		χ^2	Mean Z	Tolerance ^b
					Desirable	Undesirable			
Measured in childhood									
Immediate compliance	1.13	0.86, 1.41	5	170	3	2	0.20	8.09	600
Moral internalization	-0.33	-0.40, -0.26	15	2,285	2	13	8.07***	-9.65	7,723
Aggression	0.36	0.33, 0.38	27	12,326	0	27	27.00****	27.33	201,197
Delinquent and antisocial behavior	0.42	0.38, 0.45	13	7,016	1	12	9.31***	21.89	29,887
Quality of parent-child relationship	-0.58	-0.64, -0.52	13	2,216	0	13	13.00****	-18.96	22,419
Mental health	-0.49	-0.53, -0.44	12	4,884	0	12	12.00***	-21.53	24,655
Victim of physical abuse	0.69	0.62, 0.76	10	2,349	0	10	10.00****	18.48	12,609
Measured in adulthood									
Aggression	0.57	0.51, 0.63	4	2,402	0	4	4.00**	19.20	2,178
Criminal and antisocial behavior	0.42	0.31, 0.52	5	1,248	1	4	1.80	7.96	581
Mental health	-0.09	-0.13, -0.06	8	5,851	0	8	8.00***	-4.80	538
Adult abuse of own child or spouse	0.13	0.10, 0.17	5	7,019	0	5	5.00**	7.91	574

Note. CI = confidence interval.

^a Values represent the number of comparisons reflecting an association with either desirable or undesirable behaviors and experiences. ^b Values represent tolerance for future null results.** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

(Source – Gershoff, 2002)

Table 4 - Summary of Spanking Meta-Analyses by Outcome

Table 2

Summary of Spanking Meta-Analyses by Outcome

Detrimental child outcome	K	Spank n	No Spank n	d	95% CI		Z	I ²
Immediate defiance	5	120	30	.14	-.19	.47	.85	.80%
Low moral internalization	8	745	84	.38	.11	.65	2.76***	67.40%
Child aggression	7	4,534	1,069	.37	.13	.61	3.07***	91.40%
Child antisocial behavior	9	5,725	1,086	.39	.24	.53	5.28***	84.50%
Child externalizing behavior problems	14	25,988	1,086	.41	.32	.50	9.19***	88.40%
Child internalizing behavior problems	8	12,413	3,486	.24	.13	.35	4.36***	88.50%
Child mental health problems	10	5,122	1,313	.53	.42	.64	5.17***	76.00%
Child alcohol or substance abuse	3	6,621	90,359	.09	-.11	.29	.90	91.30%
Negative parent-child relationship	5	755	0	.51	.36	.66	6.76***	.00%
Impaired cognitive ability	8	8,358	11	.17	.01	.32	2.13*	84.30%
Low self-esteem	3	766	990	.15	.04	.26	2.76**	.00%
Low self-regulation	3	2,525	0	.30	-.07	.67	1.58	94.30%
Victim of physical abuse	8	3,334	996	.64	.39	1.74	4.07***	93.30%
Adult antisocial behavior	3	985	4,206	.36	.06	.65	2.35**	92.00%
Adult mental health problems	8	1,855	4,707	.24	.09	.40	3.05**	73.20%
Adult alcohol or substance abuse	4	2,596	4,796	.13	-.08	.35	1.21	91.90%
Adult support for physical punishment	5	1,016	177	.38	.15	.61	3.28***	55.50%
Overall effect size	111	89,638	114,722	.33	.29	.38	14.84***	88.80%

Note. K = number of effect sizes in the meta-analysis; d = mean weighted effect size; Z = significance test that d differs from zero; I² = the variation in the mean effect size attributable to heterogeneity. Bolded effect sizes are significantly different from zero.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

(Source – Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016)

Table 5 - Maltreatment Type Combinations, 2016

Table 3—9 Maltreatment Type Combinations, 2016		
MALTREATMENT TYPE COMBINATIONS	Maltreatment Type	Maltreatment Type Percent
SINGLE TYPE	-	-
Neglect includes Medical Neglect	423,007	63.0
Other/Unknown	20,258	3.0
Physical Abuse	74,548	11.1
Psychological or Emotional Maltreatment	15,504	2.3
Sexual Abuse	44,468	6.6
TWO TYPES	-	-
Neglect and "Other"/Unknown	23,182	3.5
Neglect and Physical Abuse	34,606	5.2
Neglect and Psychological Maltreatment ¹	12,858	1.9
Neglect and Sexual Abuse ²	9,079	1.4
Physical Abuse and "Other"/Unknown	681	0.1
Physical Abuse and Psychological Maltreatment ³	5,109	0.8
Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse ⁴	1,430	0.2
Sexual Abuse and Psychological Maltreatment ⁵	425	0.1
THREE TYPES	-	-
Neglect, Physical Abuse, and Psychological Maltreatment	3,176	0.5
Neglect, Physical Abuse, and "Other"/Unknown	1,207	0.2
Neglect, Physical Abuse, and Sexual Abuse ⁶	980	0.1
REMAINING COMBINATIONS	1,104	0.2
National	671,622	100.0

Based on data from 51 states.

¹ Includes 155 victims with a combination of Neglect, Psychological Maltreatment, and "Other"/Unknown.

² Includes 359 victims with a combination of Neglect, Sexual Abuse, and "Other"/Unknown.

³ Includes 24 victims with a combination of Physical Abuse, Psychological Maltreatment, and "Other"/Unknown.

⁴ Includes 26 victims with a combination of Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and "Other"/Unknown.

⁵ Includes 9 victims with a combination of Sexual Abuse, Psychological Maltreatment, and "Other"/Unknown.

⁶ Includes 1 victim with a combination of Neglect, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and "Other"/Unknown.

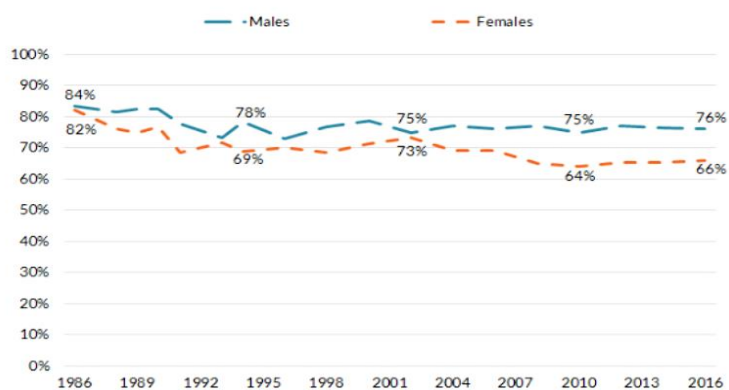
(Source - Department of Health and Human Services, 2018)

Appendix B

Figures

Figure 1

Percentage of Males and Females Ages 18 to 65 Who Agree or Strongly Agree that It Is Sometimes Necessary to Discipline a Child by Spanking: Selected Years, 1986-2016



Source: Data for 1986-2000: Child Trends. (2002). *Charting parenthood: A statistical portrait of fathers and mothers in America* [Table P5.1]. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf>. Data for 2002-2016: Child Trends' original analysis of the General Social Survey, 2002-2016.

childtrends.org

(Source – Child Trends, 2018)