

The Negative Internal and External Effects of Corporal Punishment on Children

Sarah Philbrick

Department of Psychology, Excelsior College

PSY 235: Lifespan Developmental Psychology

Dr. Becky Silver

March 17, 2020

The Negative Internal and External Effects of Corporal Punishment on Children

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

Some theorists assert that previously confirmed research findings should be questioned for their legitimacy. For example, Stephanie Hicks-Pass (2009) claims that, despite “approximately forty-five years of research” of CP directly correlating with poor social and cognitive skills, violence, crime, and aggression (p. 76), other researchers and even policymakers should reconsider the findings. She states, “If 94 percent of parents spank, and spanking has been correlated with aggression, suicidality, and psychiatric symptoms, what factor or factors could explain why 94 percent of the population is not suicidal, aggressive or depressed?” (p. 77). Hicks-Pass then encourages an exploration of “the variables of parental support” (p. 77). She claims strong emotional support from parents is an important factor in children not exhibiting negative characteristics after CP has been administered; thus, CP is not necessarily as harmful as research suggests. Although Hicks-Pass’s argument does speak to an important consideration, her conclusion is constricted: What she fails to mention is the plethora of cases of varying

Commented [A1]: The author begins her argument by providing some basic statistics to introduce the topic to her audience.

Commented [A2]: The author presents a clear, argumentative thesis here. Since the assignment required that she take a stand on an issue related to her class, her thesis should make that stand clear. Here, she acknowledges the opposing view, which will give her argument strength, but clearly asserts her position.

Commented [A3]: The author begins her essay by clearly addressing the opposing views. She knows her audience may question the validity of psychological research, as corporal punishment is certainly a divisive issue. By acknowledging that other side in an argument, an author can build his or her ethos (credibility), as this strategy lets an audience know the issue will be approached reasonably.

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

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

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

CP can be so detrimental that the child may exhibit antisocial behavior, which is one of the effects which manifests externally. Genetic factors may also play a role in the extent to which the antisocial behavior affects the child’s (or adult’s) life. According to Boutwell et al. (2011), “exposure to risky environments, when coupled with a genetic vulnerability, may increase the

Commented [A4]: Here, the author uses a strong topic sentence to make a small assertion, which is related to her bigger assertion that corporal punishment is harmful.

Commented [A5]: The use of source material can help an author appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos. In this instance, in addition to providing a logical line of reasoning (logos), this example from a source about a crying child may also work to make an emotional appeal (pathos).

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

Commented [A6]: The use of research studies as source material helps to build credibility (ethos) in an argument. In this assignment, source materials were required, and the authors chose to find credible studies from respected sources related to her field in order to make her case.

Aggression is another externalized behavior which CP can cause (Boutwell et al., 2011; Gershoff, 2010; Hicks-Pass, 2009; Maguire-Jack et al., 2012). The aggressive child may harm other children, their parents, or themselves. CP-related stressors coupled with parental influence, causes the aggression to turn into violence or abuse. Author Elizabeth Gershoff (2010) writes, “Parents, after all, learn most of their lessons about how to be a parent from their own parents” (p. 32). Physically punished children, in that sense, are more likely to practice CP on their own children, and potentially become even more violent and abuse them, as well as animals or future partners.

Commented [A7]: At the beginning and ending of paragraphs, the author often makes clear connection to the thesis. These reminders of the main argument help readers gain a clear understanding of the argument.

Researchers agree that the overwhelming evidence for the destructive nature of physical punishment rules any rebuttal negligible. Years of investigation, including surveys and controlled case studies, have gone into the exploration of the adverse effects of inflicting pain on children to make them behave. The results have overwhelmingly shown that CP is harmful. Children develop damaging, long-lasting social and mental behaviors, which often times go undiagnosed and unrecorded, thus not being represented by a statistic. Despite temporary relief for the parent, by hurting their child physically for a short period of time, parents who use CP are really damaging their children for a lifetime.

Commented [A8]: The author concludes with a clear connection to the thesis and uses a tone that is reasonable and formal. She, again, acknowledges the opposing view but makes her assertion clear in the final comments of her argument, leaving her audience with a lasting impression of her main point.

References

- Boutwell, B. B., Franklin, C. A., Barnes, J. C., & Beaver, K. M. (2011). Physical punishment and childhood aggression: The role of gender and gene-environment interplay. *Aggressive Behavior, 37*, 559–568. <http://doi.org/10.1001.132567458>
- Gershoff, E. T. (2010). More harm than good: A summary of scientific research on the intended and unintended effects of corporal punishment on children. *Law & Contemporary Problems, 73*(2), 31–56.
- Hicks-Pass, S. (2009). Corporal punishment in America today: Spare the rod, spoil the child? A systematic review of the literature. *Best Practices in Mental Health, 5*(6), 72–88.
- Maguire-Jack, K., Gromoske, A. N., & Berger, L. M. (2012). Spanking and child development during the first 5 years of life. *Child Development, 83*(6), 1960–1977.