Longitudinal Analysis of Corporal Punishment Across Groups

Breanne Porter, MA, ABD
Overview

- General arguments for and against CP
- Criticisms of research
- Defining & Measuring CP
- Potential Moderators
- My research
- Implications for professionals
- Implications for policymakers
Opponents of CP

• Most studies show CP related to negative outcomes:
  – Aggression (Flynn, 1999; Mahoney, et al. 2000)
  – Delinquency/criminality (Frick et al. 1999; McCord, 1991; Straus & Mouradian, 1998)
  – Emotional problems (Goodman et al. 1998; McCabe et al. 1999)
  – Less moral internalization (Crockenburg, 1987; Harvey et al. 1997)
  – Adult psychiatric disorders (Nettelbladt et al. 1996; Straus 1995)
  – Physical abuse (Caselles & Milner, 2000; Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993)
  – Risk of abusing one’s own child or spouse (Straus, 1994)

The burden of proof is on supporters of CP to prove beneficial (not just neutral) effects.
Proponents of CP
(e.g. Baumrind, Larzelere, Cowan, Holden, Parke)

- Findings not conclusive enough to advise against it.
- Don’t know direction of effects (CP > negative child behaviors? OR negative child behaviors > CP).
- How CP is defined & distinguished from abuse
- For some races & contexts CP may have neutral or beneficial outcomes.
Which came first? CP or Bad Behavior?

- Experimental designs unethical – must infer causality
- Parents choose to use CP *because* they believe it will have an effect on the child’s behavior.
- If we found CP to be related to prosocial behaviors, no one would argue that prosocial behavior elicited CP.
- Behavior does not have to be inappropriate to elicit CP. Culp et al. (1999) found that 90% of low income teen moms used CP in response to *age appropriate* behavior.
- Cross-sectional studies fail to establish temporal order. Longitudinal studies needed to show direction of effect.
Longitudinal Research

- Recent longitudinal studies with appropriate controls have found that CP does predict child behavior more than vice versa (Grogan-Kaylor, 2004, 2005; Jaffee et al., 2004).

- Mulvaney & Mebert (2007) controlled for child temperament at 6 months in predicting antisocial behavior (ASB) at age 3 & controlled for ASB at age 3 in predicting ASB at 1st grade.
Defining CP – According to Proponents of CP

- Baumrind, et al. (2002): Hitting with an object, or words like "punitive" should not be included in research on normative CP.

- Only CP used in ways more likely to be "beneficial" should be included (e.g. ≤ 2 swats on behind, certain ages, supportive relationship)
Problems with Limited Definitions

• Circular logic - Including their prediction (that it has beneficial effects) in their definition of CP

• Disagreement about what ages are best. Baumrind: 1.5yrs-puberty. Larzelere: 2-6yrs.

• 35% of U.S. parents w/ infants use CP (Strauss & Stewart, 1999). Over 60% of Chinese parents w/ infants (Tang, 2006).
• Contrived definitions don’t correspond to how general public defines CP.
• Even low levels of “instrumental” (vs. “punitive”) CP negatively effects children’s behavior (Straus & Mouradian, 1998).
• Hitting with objects is most common form of CP: 
  • in schools
  • by Caribbean parents (Mathurin, Gielen, & Lancaster, 2006; Steely & Rohner, 2006).
Today’s Definition of CP

- Review of the literature: “Physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child’s behavior” (Straus, 1994)
- My own research: “Spanked or slapped... when [the child] behaved badly”
Common Measures of CP

- Conflict Tactics Scale – Parent-Child:
  - Spanked on buttocks with hand only
  - In past year: never, not in past year, once, twice, 3–5 times, 6–10 times, 11–20 times, >20 times

- Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME)
  - Yes/No parent reported spanking in last week
  - Yes/No interviewer observed spanking
Parental Involvement / Nurturance

- Simons, Johnson, & Conger (1994): CP not related to adolescent outcomes after controlling for parental involvement. (trust, love, care about, listen to, monitor, consistently discipline, reason with)


- Amato & Fowler (2002): No interaction between parental involvement and CP.
Race as a Moderator

• Most studies find no racial differences in effects of CP.
• Deater-Deckard & Dodge (1997) and Gunnoe & Mariner (1997) found that CP predicted externalizing behavior in white but not African American children.
• Bradley et al. (2001) found differential effects of CP on behavior problems & academics for certain race/SES combos. No group had a majority of positive outcomes.
• Some theorize that children in cultures where CP is more accepted are also more accepting of it and thus have better (or less negative) outcomes.
My Research

- Do parental involvement and/or race moderate the effects of CP on disobedience years later?
- Hypotheses:
  - More CP > More Disobedience
  - More Parental Involvement > Less Disobedience
  - No interactions
Sample

- 409 parents from the National Survey of Families and Households
- 50% of parents and 50% of children on whom they reported were female.
- Mean child age was 5 years at Wave 1 and 11 years at Wave 2.
- 65% white/not Hispanic, 35% black
Measures: Corporal Punishment

High vs. Low

• How often do you "spank or slap" the child?
  • "Never" or "Seldom" = Low CP group
  • "Sometimes" or "Very Often" = High CP group

• From another item (# in past week), we know High CP parents ($M = .97$) spanked nearly 5 times more often than Low CP parents ($M = .21$)
Measures: Parental Involvement
High vs. Low

- Sample split in half based on composite variable. 4 point scale from "Never" to "Very often"
  - in leisure activities away from home
  - at home working on a project or playing together
  - having private talks
  - helping with reading or homework
  - praise
  - hug

Marsiglio (1991)
Measures: Disobedience

- Measured at Wave 2
- Single item, "is disobedient at home," over the past 3 months
- 3 pt scale from "Not true" to "Often true"
Analyses

- 2 x 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA
  - 3 main effects, 3 two-way interactions, CP x Involvement x Race interaction
  - One-way ANOVAs to examine if CP > Disobedience for all 4 demographic groups
    - Black High-Involvement
    - Black Low-Involvement
    - White High-Involvement
    - White Low-Involvement
Results

- More CP > More Disobedience $F(1, 406) = 10.27, p = .001$
- More Parental Involvement > Less Disobedience $F(1, 406) = 10.02, p=.002$
- No interactions

Race & Parental Involvement did NOT moderate the effects of CP on Disobedience.
Results

One-way ANOVAs

- For all groups, More CP > More Disobedience
- Only statistically significant for:
  - White High Involvement \( F(1, 142) = 4.34, p = .039 \)
  - Black Low Involvement \( F(1,62) = 6.81, p = .011 \)
Conclusions

- Not only can CP have negative effects for black children, but this effect can sometimes be greater than for white children.
- CP does not support or enhance other parenting efforts, it undermines them.
- Parents must work even harder to offset the negative effects of CP.
All Things in Moderation

- There are an infinite number of demographic combinations we could research.
- Cannot be practically applied by helping professionals anyway.
- Unrealistic to screen for a dozen different risk & protective factors before advising parents.
- Especially when advising parents in a diverse group setting, such as parenting class.
Implications for Professionals

- Institutional level: Official stance against CP
  - American Academy of Pediatrics
  - National Association of Social Workers
  - Amer. Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
  - Society for Adolescent Medicine
  - Nat’l Assoc. for the Education of Young Children
  - American Public Health Association
  - United Methodist Church
Implications for Professionals

- Individual level:
  - Be respectful but firm and unambiguous
  - Focus on effectiveness not morality
  - Work within parent’s belief system
  - Distinguish CP from other forms of punishment
  - Provide alternatives to CP
Not worth the risks

- When you advise or condone the use of CP in certain forms, you risk parents using your advice to justify more severe forms of CP.

- As much as 2/3 of physical abuse incidents begin as attempts to discipline children or teach them a lesson (Coontz & Martin, 1988; Gil, 1973; Kadushin & Martin, 1981).
Current Policies in the U.S.

- 27 states prohibit CP by teachers & guardians other than parents.
- Supreme Court upheld right of teachers to use corporal punishment with their students including those with disabilities.
Options for Policymakers

- Nationwide ban on CP in schools and all non-family contexts
- Discontinuation of CP as an acceptable legal defense for allegations of assault
- Eventually civil laws prohibiting the use of CP by parents with a focus on education not punishment
Countries with Full Abolition

- Sweden banned CP in 1979:
  - Info about law & alternative discipline sent to every home w/ children & printed on milk cartons
  - Right to paid time off to attend parenting classes
  - Today 78% of middle-schoolers never spanked
  - Less delinquency, theft, drug abuse, & suicide
- 31 other countries have since banned CP
Take Home Message

- A decade ago, much of the research prompted valid criticisms from proponents of CP.
- Studies using longitudinal designs & examining group differences answered those criticisms.
- CP will not necessarily ruin a child’s life, but it is never the best option. It is a risk factor.
- CP is at best ineffective and at worst dangerous. Do what you can to prevent it.