The Relationship between Spanking and Aggression

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Abstract

This study will investigate the relationship between spanking and aggression.  Past research indicated that spanking sets an example for children that corporal punishment is an appropriate way to change an individual’s undesired behavior. Spanking as a technique of discipline endorses aggression as a means to resolve conflicts with others. Sixty-four middle-school aged children, 32 females and 32 males, ages 11-years-old through 13-years-old will be randomly selected to determine if early childhood spanking leads to later aggression. Parental response will determine if corporal punishment was used as a form of discipline during the participant’s childhood. Using the Aggression Scale, each participant will be administered a questionnaire evaluating their aggression within the past 7 days. A *t*-test will be used to measure the mean difference between the 2 groups. This study will have implications for parents who are considering the use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline for their child.

The Relationship between Spanking and Aggression

 “I was spanked all the time, I was a terrible kid. But look, we turned out okay, we are here, right?” (CBS News, 2010). These words of parenting expert, Cooper Lawrence, are parallel to many parents’ responses when asked if they were spanked as children. Despite growing research, which reveals that spanking as a form of physical discipline can pose serious risks to children, parents ignore this message and continue to spank their children (Smith, 2012).

Corporal punishment is the use of physical force by someone in authority who has the intention of causing a child to experience pain with the objective of correction or control over the child’s specific behavior (Straus, as cited in Simons & Wurtelle, 2010). Spanking has significant drawbacks for childrens’ future behaviors. Drawbacks include the child becoming resistant to the punishment with repeated measure and making discipline more challenging as the child matures (Park, 2010). Parents do not foresee the consequences of their actions when they are in the act of physically disciplining their child. As a result of physical punishment, children acquire aggressive attitudes as they mature. Spanking sets an example for children that an individual’s behavior can be changed through the use of corporal punishment. In the moment, spanking may appear to be an act that will distinguish for children what is right behavior from what is wrong behavior; however, through the use of spanking, children are instead taught that conflicts can be resolved through aggressive acts. This method of correcting behavior is controversial among society because as these children mature, they will result to aggression as a means to solve their problems. This in turn will create a society established upon the notion that physical aggression is a viable method to solve conflicts.

 Pediatrics concluded that spanking can do more harm than good when it comes to punishing undesired behavior (Bennit-Smith, 2013). There is no evidence that spanking completely terminates the undesired behavior of the child. In all actuality, when children are spanked, they see spanking as a model of aggression to solve their problems, which in turn teaches children that if you hit people, you can get what you want (Bennit-Smith, 2013). Spanking focuses on immediate results, but fails to look at the long-run consequences. Spanking is used as a means to suspend the current behavior of a child. Parents neglect to realize that when they use spanking as a technique for discipline, they set an example for their children that endorses physical aggression as a means to resolve conflicts with their siblings or peers (Smith, 2012).

 Past research revealed that if a child receives corporal punishment, the child learns that acting out in an aggressive manner is appropriate and acceptable (CBS News, 2010). Parents use corporal punishment with the intention of correcting misbehavior, but ultimately, such actions fail to teach children how to regulate themselves over time, thus, they result to aggressive behaviors (Bennit-Smith, 2013). Past studies revealed the link between physical punishment during the early years of childhood and higher levels of aggression against parents, siblings, peers, and later in life, spousal assault (Bennit-Smith, 2013). Researchers cannot neglect to consider important external factors such as parental stress, alcohol abuse, and the viewing of violent television when evaluating the relationship between spanking and later child aggression; however, evidence has greatly supported the association between spanking and aggression among children (Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013).

 Information for past research has been collected primarily through self-reports, specifically, from the mothers and fathers of the participant children (Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013). Core interviews were conducted when the child was 3-years-old, and again on a separate occasion 2-years later when the child was 5-years-old. Research evidence revealed that the more frequently the child was spanked, the higher the odds were that the child would display increased aggression (Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013). Results indicated that a child from a two-parent household displayed lower levels of aggression when compared to a child from a single-parent home (Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013); however, Martin, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn (as cited in Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013), and Prinzie, Onghena, and Hellinckx (as cited in Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013) revealed no significant differences in the relations of maternal spanking versus paternal spanking and later child aggression. Uniform to social learning theory (Bandura, as cited in Lee, Altschul, & Gershoff, 2013), results of this study suggested that parental spanking only reinforces a child’s use of aggression, rather than terminating it.

 Research reports came from parents who were assessed using self-report measures constructed on the basis of their personal practices and beliefs regarding corporal punishment (Simons & Wurtelle, 2010). To balance out potential parental biased answers, children were also interviewed by researchers to assist in receiving the most accurate and valid results. The children were assessed in regards to their approval of spanking and hitting (Simons & Wurtelle, 2010). It was expected that the use of parental corporal punishment would predict the child’s tolerance of spanking and the acceptance to hit others to settle personal conflicts during the childhood years.

 Evidence was provided based upon past research that parental behaviors and attitudes concerning the use of corporal punishment is frequently transmitted to their children (Simons & Wurtelle, 2010). The pattern of spanking among parents and their children is a continuous cycle of habits. Parents who experienced spanking as a child are more likely to approve of it as a strategy for handling their own child’s misbehavior. Uniform to findings of Buntain-Ricklefs, Kemper, Bell, and Babonis (as cited in Simons & Wurtelle, 2010), recent studies demonstrated how corporal punishment experience is able to predict future corporal punishment acceptance. A significant positive relationship was found between the approval of the use of corporal punishment among parents and its reported frequency of use with their own children (Simons & Wurtelle, 2010). Therefore, there are notable explanations as to why many parents who report having been spanked as a child will continue the cycle of spanking by spanking their own children without giving it a second thought.

In this particular study, corporal punishment, specifically spanking, will be evaluated and measured to determine its effects on later child aggression. For the purpose of this study, spanking refers to striking a child’s buttocks, with either an open hand or with an implement such as a belt, as punishment for unacceptable behavior. Aggression in this study refers to acts of anger or violence in terms of physical behaviors. An example of physical aggression is one child hitting a second child with the intention of getting the second child to share a toy with him or her. Instead of using words to communicate the desired behavior, physical actions are expressed and often physical harm ensues.

This study exercises quasi-experimental design. The unique feature of this study that distinguishes it from past studies is the two part measurement scale. One scale will be completed by a parent and the other scale, which will be completed by the child. This empirical study will examine the relationship between spanking and aggression among children. Individuals who experience corporal punishment as a child, specifically spanking, will have a greater pattern of aggressive behaviors and outbursts when they mature when compared to children who were not spanked during their early years of life.

**Method**

**Overview**

 The goal of this research is to identify the relationship between the use of spanking as an early corporal punishment practice and later childhood aggression to resolve conflicts with others. Research will be accomplished by exercising a non-manipulative quasi-experiment. The reason for implementing a quasi-design is because two groups of children will be compared to identify their levels of aggression based upon parental practices. Researchers want to compare the behaviors of the two groups of children but are unable to manipulate the characteristics on which group is treated with corporal punishment and which group is not, because that constitutes as unethical treatment. The independent variable in this research is spanking and the dependent variable is aggression. The researcher will be collecting nominal data for spanking as the independent variable because the researcher wants to determine how often and the quantity at which corporal punishment occurs. The researcher will collect ordinal data for aggression as the dependent variable because the results of the dependent variable will be unequal in their ranking.

**Participants**

 Participants of this study will consist of 64 middle-school aged children. The participants will be 11-years-old to 13-years-old. Thirty-two of the participants will be female and 32 of the participants will be male. Participants will be recruited from a rural city in Northern California through random sampling. Probability sampling technique will be implemented so that each participant has an equal chance of being selected for participation and to increase the external validity of the research. Participants will come from diverse backgrounds. The participants will predominantly be Caucasian, 80%, with the other remaining 20% coming from Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Asian backgrounds. Participants will come from families where income ranges from $23,000, considered low income, to $100,000, considered high income. Participants will be assigned to two groups through random selection. The researcher will distribute the questionnaires and measures to the first 32 participants, then the second 32 participants will follow suite when the first group has finished. Informed written consent will be given from the parents of the participants, the school teachers, school principle, and school district. Both written and verbal consent will be obtained from the participants.

**Materials**

 One parent of each of the child participants will receive a fixed formatted Likert scale questionnaire by mail from their child’s school that will be measured quantitatively. The scale has responses ranging from never to several times a week as its anchors. The questionnaire will contain 26 specific discipline behaviors, which will measure nine broader discipline scales. How often a parent spanked their child within the past year is a sample item for the parent questionnaire (Straus & Fauchier, 2011). The scale will measure the frequency in which the parent exercised the use of specific corporal punishment behaviors on the child within the past year. The response categories will measure discipline in a range from “N” (never) to nine. The numbers indicate a systematic progression in the frequency of the parents’ actions from within the past year, to within the past months, to within the past weeks, and within the past days. The scale will be scored by adding all of the responses of the parent. There is a possible range of scores between 0 and 234 points. Each point represents the frequency of the action the parent reported engaging in within the past year. A lower score represents less frequent engagement of the action by the parent, and a higher score represents more frequent engagement of the action by the parent. The reliability the measure will provide is internal consistency. Content validity will result from an analysis of existing instruments (Straus & Fauchier, 2011). Once complete, the parents will be asked to personally deliver and return the questionnaire to their child’s teacher, who will keep the contents of the questionnaire confidential and deliver the questionnaire to the researcher.

All children involved in this research will have the same testing procedure. Each participant will first be given a questionnaire with nine demographic questions. Once complete, the participant will be given a Likert survey which will measure personal acts of aggression within the past seven days. Items on the scale will ask the participant what the frequency was of the participant engaging in specific emotional feelings, physical actions, and verbal communication within the past seven days. The scale will contain 11 items and be measured on a 6-point scale. Zero will mean the respondent experienced the specified behavior zero times in the past seven days, and a score of six will mean the respondent experienced the specified behaviors six or more times in the past seven days. How many times the participant slapped or kicked someone within the past seven days is a sample item from the measure (Orpinas, Frankowski, 2001). The scale will be scored by adding all of the responses of each child. There is a possible range of scores between 0 and 66 points. Each point represents one aggressive behavior the particular child reported engaging in within the past seven days prior to taking the questionnaire. The score cannot be computed if four or more items are missing from the participant (Orpinas, Frankowski, 2001). The scale will be fixed format and measured quantitatively. The scale has responses ranging zero times per week to six or more times per week as its anchors. Each participant will be allotted 30 minutes to finish both the questionnaire and the survey. Reliability for this measure will be determined by internal consistency. The range of internal consistency for this measure is 0.87 to 0.88 (Orpinas, Frankowski, 2001). No standard validity has been offered or presented for this measure (Orpinas, Frankowski, 2001).

**Procedure**

 Approval has been given by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University, Chico. Data will be collected before school at a public middle school in a rural Northern Californian town. The participants will be randomly selected from two classrooms whose teachers have agreed to allow their students to participate in the research. Half of the participants, 32 children, will be led by the researcher to an unoccupied classroom with 32 desks. Each desk will be separated by 18 inches of space to ensure confidentiality. Each participant will remain at the designated desk until every participant has completed the questionnaire and the measure. At that time, all of the participants from the first group will return to their classroom and resume their school day. The researcher will then lead the second group, 32 children, to the same unoccupied classroom and follow the same procedure as the first group of participants.

 Informed consent will be obtained in written form from each individual participant, his or her parent, the principle of the middle school, and the teacher of the student whose class the student is absent for while taking the questionnaire. Debriefing will be conducted before the participants are given the questionnaire and the measure to ensure that they are aware of the research being conducted. At this point, the participants will be free to ask the researcher any questions they may have or abandon the research as a participant. The researchers expects a low attrition rate. The incentive of this research is to determine if there is a relationship between parents who practice corporal punishment on their child at a young age, and the child’s level of aggression at a later age.

**Statistical Analysis Plan**

 The hypothesis of this study is to determine the relationship between spanking and aggression. A *t*-test for independent means will be used for this research. Rationale for this statistical test is determined from the stated research hypothesis, which indicates the necessity to average and compare the relationship of the two groups. The first group, the children whose parents indicated the use of corporal punishment will be measured once, and the second group, whose parents indicated no use of corporal punishment will also be measured once to determine if there is a relationship between the use of early corporal punishment and later childhood aggression. The alpha level is set at 5%, which is the probability level that will be used by the researcher to specify the greatest value that allows for the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. The degrees of freedom (DF) for this research was obtained from the formula, DF= (N1+ N2)-2. The calculated DF for this research study is 62, obtained from the formula, DF= (32+32)-2. The critical value is obtained when looking at the DF (62) for a one-tailed test at the (p<.05) level.

If the obtained *t*-value is greater than the calculated critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected and researchers have statistically significant results supporting the hypothesis. The probability of this occurring by chance is less than 5%. At the (p<.05) level, there is a statistically significant difference in the level of aggression expressed by children who were spanked and children who were not spanked as a means of a discipline technique in their childhood.

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Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions:

Please check ()the appropriate boxes in which you identify. Anonymity of this questionnaire is ensured. When complete, please place this questionnaire in the envelope provided to you by the researcher. Your cooperation is appreciated, thank you in advance for your time.

1. What is your age?

 🞏 9-10

 🞏 11-12

 🞏 13-14

 🞏 15-16

2. What is your gender?

 🞏 Male

 🞏 Female

3. What is your ethnicity?

 🞏 Caucasian

 🞏 Hispanic American

 🞏 African American

 🞏 Native American

 🞏 Asian

 🞏 Pacific Islander

 🞏 Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your guardian(s) religious affiliation?

 🞏 Protestant Christian

 🞏 Roman Catholic

 🞏 Evangelical Christian

 🞏 Jewish

 🞏 Muslim

 🞏 Hindu

 🞏 Buddhist

 🞏 Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the marital status of your guardian(s)?

 🞏 Married

 🞏 Single Mom

 🞏 Single Dad

 🞏 Widowed

 🞏 Divorced

 🞏 Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the income level of your guardian(s)?

 🞏 $0.00- $23,000

 🞏 $23, 001-$40,000

 🞏 $40,001- $75,000

 🞏 $75, 001- $99,999

 🞏 $100,000 or greater

7. Please indicate how many siblings live in the same house as you (if any).

 🞏 None (I am an only child or I have a sibling(s) who does not live in my house)

 🞏 1-2

 🞏 3-4

 🞏 5 or more

8. What is the age of your guardian(s) in years?

 🞏 Less than 20

 🞏 21-30

 🞏 31-40

 🞏 41-50

 🞏 51-60

 🞏 61 or older

9. What is the highest level of school your guardian(s) has completed?

 🞏 No schooling completed

 🞏 Preschool- 5th grade

 🞏 Grades 6-8

 🞏 Some high school

 🞏 High school diploma

 🞏 General Education Diploma (GED)

 🞏 Some college

 🞏 College degree

 🞏 Advanced degree