

# Corporal punishment of children: summary of research on its impact and associations

## Introduction

Corporal punishment – violence inflicted on children by parents, teachers, carers and others in the name of “discipline” – is experienced by a large majority of children in many states worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Some children, including children with disabilities<sup>2</sup> and young children, are particularly likely to experience it.

Corporal punishment is a violation of children’s rights and international human rights law requires prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment, including in the family home. Research can powerfully illuminate and support advocacy on the issue – and the message from research is very clear: **corporal punishment carries multiple risks of harm and has no benefits.**

**A major 2002 meta-analysis** of 88 studies found associations between lawful corporal punishment by parents and ten negative outcomes,<sup>3</sup> and another **major meta-analysis in 2016**, which reviewed 75 studies published over 50 years, involving a total of 160,927 children,<sup>4</sup> confirmed the findings of the earlier meta-analysis and found evidence of associations with five more negative outcomes.

The evidence is now overwhelming – more than 300 studies show associations between corporal punishment and a wide range of negative outcomes, while no studies have found evidence of any benefits.

This summary of research illustrates how corporal punishment violates not just children’s right to freedom from all violence, but also their rights to health, development and education, and has damaging effects on society as well as individuals. It supports arguments that the prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment is a low-cost effective public health measure, for example in the prevention of domestic violence, mental illness and antisocial behaviour and to support welfare, education and developmental outcomes for children.

The information in this summary is taken from End Corporal Punishment’s longer working paper that examines corporal punishment’s impacts and associations in greater depth. You can read more about the research on any of the topics covered in this summary in our [full working paper here](#).<sup>5</sup>

## The prevalence of corporal punishment

**Enormous numbers of children experience corporal punishment in their homes, schools, care and work settings and the penal system in all world regions.** The Know Violence in Childhood 2017 study estimated that 1.3 billion boys and girls aged 1-14 years experience corporal punishment at home.\* UNICEF statistics collected between 2005 and 2013 in 62 countries highlighted that violent “discipline” is the most common form of violence against children. The report found that on average about four in five children aged 2-14 had experienced violent “discipline” (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) at home in the past month. On average, 17% of children experienced severe physical punishment (being hit on the head, face or ears or hit hard and repeatedly) at home in the past month.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UNICEF (2014), Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, NY: UNICEF

<sup>2</sup>Hendricks, C. et al (2014), “Associations Between Child Disabilities and Caregiver Discipline and Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries”, Child Development, published online 29 July 2013

<sup>3</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), “Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review”, Psychological Bulletin, 128(4), 539-579; see also E. T. Gershoff (2008), Report on physical punishment in the United States: what research tells us about its effects on children, Columbus, Ohio: Center for Effective Discipline

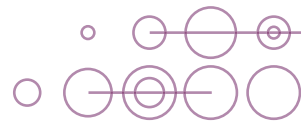
<sup>4</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), “Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analyses”, Journal of Family Psychology, advance online publication 7 April 2016

<sup>5</sup>[endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/research/](http://endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/research/)

<sup>6</sup>UNICEF (2014), Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, NY: UNICEF

\*Know Violence in Childhood. 2017, *Ending Violence in Childhood, Global Report 2017*.





# The effects of corporal punishment

## Direct physical harm

**Corporal punishment kills thousands of children each year, injures many more and is the direct cause of many children's physical impairments.**<sup>7</sup> Research in countries in all regions attests to the severity of the physical violence which children experience in the name of “discipline”. Corporal punishment includes children being hit with hands and objects; being kicked, shaken and forced to maintain uncomfortable positions; and a wide range of other painful and degrading treatment.<sup>8</sup>

**Most violence against children commonly referred to as “abuse” is corporal punishment.** Research has consistently found that the majority of incidents substantiated by authorities as physical “abuse” are cases of physical punishment.<sup>9</sup> The intent to discipline or punish has been shown to be a common precursor in many child homicide cases.<sup>10</sup>

**When research has distinguished between physical punishment and “abuse”, it has found associations.** All ten of the studies on child protection in the major 2002 meta-analysis found that corporal punishment was significantly associated with physical “abuse”;<sup>11</sup> the 2016 meta-analysis examined eight studies and confirmed this finding.<sup>12</sup> Other studies have found similar associations<sup>13</sup> and links between corporal punishment and involvement with child protection services.<sup>14</sup>

**All physical punishment, however “mild” and “light”, carries an inbuilt risk of escalation:** its effectiveness in controlling children's behaviour decreases over time, encouraging the punisher to increase the intensity of the punishment.<sup>15</sup> The risk of escalation is increased by the fact that adults who inflict physical punishment are often angry: their anger can increase the level of force used beyond what was intended, and their intent may be retaliatory as well as punitive.<sup>16</sup>

**Even more “moderate” corporal punishment is associated with atypical brain functioning** in areas that have been found to be impacted by more severe abuse, suggesting that “spanking” affects children's brain development,<sup>17</sup> and should not be considered a separate category from “abuse”.

## Poor moral internalisation and increased antisocial behaviour

**Far from teaching children how to behave, corporal punishment actually makes it less likely that they learn the lessons adults want them to learn.** In 2021 researchers at University College London examined 69 studies carried out over two decades in nine countries, and found that regardless of any external factors, including gender, ethnicity, race or geography, the links between physical punishment and negative child behaviour remain consistent: when corporal punishment is used against them, children's behaviour suffers.<sup>18</sup>

In the 2002 meta-analysis, 13 of 15 studies on the topic found that corporal punishment does not contribute to the child's long-term compliance to the desired behaviour.<sup>19</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined eight studies on low moral internalization and confirmed the association.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Krug E. G. et al (2002), World Report on Violence and Health, Geneva: World Health

<sup>8</sup>Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006), General Comment No. 8: The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia) (CRC/C/GC/8)

<sup>9</sup>For example, Jud, A. & Trocmé, N. (2013), Physical Abuse and Physical Punishment in Canada, Child Canadian Welfare Research Portal Information Sheet #

<sup>10</sup>Cavanagh, K. & Dobash, P. (2007), “The murder of children by fathers in the context of child abuse”, Child Abuse & Neglect, 31, 731–46

<sup>11</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>12</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>13</sup>Trocmé, N. et al (2010), Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Executive Summary & Chapters 1-5, Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; see also Jud, A. & Trocmé, N. (2013), Physical Abuse and Physical Punishment in Canada, Child Canadian Welfare Research Portal Information Sheet # 122

<sup>14</sup>Lee, S. J. et al (2014), “Parental spanking of 1-year-old children and subsequent child protective services involvement”, Child Abuse & Neglect, published online 3 March 2014

<sup>15</sup>Straus, M. & Douglas, E (2008), “Research on spanking by parents: Implications for public policy” The Family Psychologist: Bulletin of the Division of Family Psychology 24(43), 18-20

<sup>16</sup>Durrant, J. E. et al (2004), Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth, Ottawa: Coalition of Physical Punishment of Children and Youth

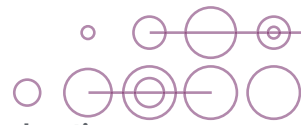
<sup>17</sup>Cuarteras, J. et al (2021), “Corporal Punishment and Elevated Neural Response to Threat in Children”, Child Development, Volume 92, Issue 3

<sup>18</sup>Heilmann, A. et al (2021), “Physical punishment and child outcomes: a narrative review of prospective studies”, The Lancet, Volume 398, Issue 10297

<sup>19</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>20</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit





**Corporal punishment has been found to be a factor in behaviours such as bullying, lying, cheating, running away, truancy, school behaviour problems and involvement in crime as a child and young adult.** In 12 of the 13 studies included in the 2002 meta-analysis, corporal punishment was found to be significantly associated with an increase in delinquent and antisocial behaviour.<sup>21</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined nine studies on antisocial behaviour and confirmed the association. It also examined 14 studies on children's externalizing behaviour problems and eight on children's internalizing behaviour problems and found associations between corporal punishment and both types of behaviour problem.<sup>22</sup> The link with behaviour problems has been confirmed by numerous later studies, including longitudinal studies involving both young<sup>23</sup> and older<sup>24</sup> children.

**Corporal punishment can reduce empathy,<sup>25</sup> moral regulation,<sup>26</sup> conflict-solving and self-regulation skills.<sup>27</sup>** It does not teach children how to behave or help them understand how their behaviour affects others; rather than helping children to develop the desire and motivation to behave well of their own accord, it teaches them that it is desirable not to get caught. Corporal punishment may also decrease the likelihood of long-term compliance by damaging adult-child relationships, introducing fear and undermining the powerful behavioural motivations of children's love and respect for their parents and other adults involved in their care and education.

### Increased aggression in children

**There is abundant evidence that corporal punishment is associated with increased aggression in children.** All 27 studies on the topic included in the 2002 meta-analysis found an association.<sup>28</sup> This was confirmed by the 2016 meta-analysis, which examined seven studies on the topic.<sup>29</sup> All the other numerous studies on the topic have also confirmed the association.<sup>30</sup> Children who have experienced corporal punishment are more likely to be aggressive towards their peers,<sup>31</sup> to approve of the use of violence in peer relationships, to bully and to experience violence from their peers,<sup>32</sup> to use violent methods to resolve conflict<sup>33</sup> and to be aggressive towards their parents.<sup>34</sup>

**The reasons may include that aggression is a reflexive response to experiencing pain,** that children learn that violence is an appropriate method of getting what you want, that children copy their parents' behaviour, and that they have had less opportunity to develop conflict-solving skills. Children describe feeling aggressive after being physically punished.<sup>35</sup>

### Adult perpetration of violent, antisocial and criminal behaviour

**The violent behaviour of children who have experienced corporal punishment persists into adulthood.** In the 2002 meta-analysis, all four studies on aggression in adulthood found a significant association with childhood experience of corporal punishment and four of the five studies on corporal punishment and criminal and antisocial behaviour in adulthood found an association.<sup>36</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined three studies on adult antisocial behaviour and confirmed the association.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>22</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>23</sup>Scott, S. et al (2013), "Early parental physical punishment and emotional and behavioural outcomes in preschool children", *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 40(3), 337-45; MacKenzie,

<sup>24</sup>Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2005), "Corporal Punishment and the Growth Trajectory of Children's Antisocial Behavior", *Child Maltreatment*, 10, 283-292

<sup>25</sup>Lopez, N. et al (2001), "Parental disciplinary history, current levels of empathy, and moral reasoning in young adults", *North American Journal of Psychology*, 3, 193-204

<sup>26</sup>Kerr, D. C. R. et al (2004), "Parental Discipline and Externalizing Behavior Problems in Early Childhood: The Role of Moral Regulation and Child Gender", *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 32(4), 369-383

<sup>27</sup>Cuartas, J. (2021). The Effect of Spanking on Early Social-Emotional Skills. *Child Development*.

<sup>28</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>29</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>30</sup>Straus, M. A. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>31</sup>Ani, C. C. & Grantham-McGregor, S. (1998), "Family and personal characteristics of aggressive Nigerian boys: Differences from and similarities with Western findings", *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 23(5), 311-317

<sup>32</sup>Ohene, S. et al (2006), "Parental Expectations, Physical Punishment, and Violence Among Adolescents Who Score Positive on a Psychosocial Screening Test in Primary Care", *Pediatrics*, 117(2), 441-447

<sup>33</sup>Hart, C. H. et al (1990), "Children's expectations of the outcomes of social strategies: Relations with sociometric status and maternal disciplinary styles", *Child Development*, 61(1), 127-

<sup>34</sup>Ulman, A. & Straus, M. A. (2003), "Violence by children against mothers in relation to violence

<sup>35</sup>Dobbs, T. (2005), *Insights: children & young people speak out about family discipline*, Save the Children New Zealand

<sup>36</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>37</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit





**Corporal punishment perpetuates itself.** Adults who have experienced corporal punishment are more likely to inflict it on their own children, and children who experience it are more likely to approve of its use.<sup>38</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined five studies on the topic and found an association between experiencing corporal punishment as a child and holding positive attitudes about spanking as an adult.<sup>39</sup>

## Mental harm

**Corporal punishment is emotionally as well as physically painful and its links to poor mental health in childhood are clear.** In the 2002 meta-analysis, all 12 studies found that corporal punishment is significantly associated with a decrease in children's mental health, including with behaviour disorders, anxiety disorders, depression and hopelessness.<sup>40</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined ten studies on childhood mental health problems and confirmed the association. It additionally examined three studies on self-esteem and found an association between children experiencing corporal punishment and having low self-esteem.<sup>41</sup> Other studies have found associations with suicide attempts, alcohol and drug dependency, low self-esteem, hostility and emotional instability.<sup>42</sup> Qualitative evidence has confirmed that children experience fear, pain and sadness when exposed to corporal punishment.<sup>43</sup>

The associations hold true in adulthood. All eight studies on mental health in adulthood in the 2002 meta-analysis found an association between corporal punishment and poor mental health, including low self-esteem, depression, alcoholism, self-harm and suicidal tendencies.<sup>44</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined eight studies on adult mental health problems and confirmed the association.<sup>45</sup> Significant later studies include nationally representative studies in Canada,<sup>46</sup> Finland<sup>47</sup> and the USA<sup>48</sup> which found associations with mental health problems including depression, anxiety disorder and alcohol and drug abuse.

## Indirect physical harm

**Corporal punishment can have a negative impact on children's physical health.** Associations have been found between corporal punishment and children feeling that their health was poor, experiencing physical illnesses such as asthma, suffering injuries and accidents, being hospitalised and developing habits which put their health at risk, such as smoking, fighting with others and alcohol consumption.<sup>49</sup>

**The effect can continue into adulthood.** Research has found associations with developing cancer, asthma,<sup>50</sup> alcohol-related problems,<sup>51</sup> migraine,<sup>52</sup> cardiovascular disease, arthritis and obesity as an adult.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Lunkenheimer, E. S. et al (2006), "The Intergenerational Transmission of Physical Punishment: Differing Mechanisms in Mothers' and Fathers' Endorsement?", *Journal of Family Violence*, 21, 509-519

<sup>39</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>40</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>41</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>42</sup>Fergusson, D.M. & Lynskey, M.T. (1997), "Physical punishment/maltreatment during childhood and adjustment in young adulthood", *Child Abuse and Neglect* 21, 617-30; de Zoysa, P. et al (2008), "Corporal Punishment in the Sri Lankan Context: Psychological Outcomes for Our Children", in Devore, D. M. (2006), *New Developments in Parent-Child Relations*, Nova Science Publishers Inc

<sup>43</sup>González, M. R., Trujillo, A., & Carvalho, G. (2019). *Castigo físico en Colombia la voz de los niños, las niñas y los adolescentes: aportes para una educación fundamentada en derechos humanos*. Educútrica.

<sup>44</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>45</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>46</sup>Affifi, T. O. (2014), "Child abuse and mental disorders in Canada", *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, published online 22 April 2014

<sup>47</sup>Österman, K. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>48</sup>Affifi, T. O. et al (2012), "Physical Punishment and Mental Disorders: Results From a Nationally Representative US Sample", *Pediatrics*, 2 July 2012

<sup>49</sup>Lau, J. T. F. et al (1999), "Prevalence and correlates of physical abuse in Hong Kong Chinese adolescents: A population-based approach", *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23, 549-557

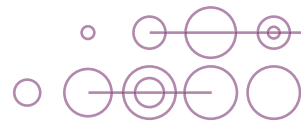
<sup>50</sup>Hyland, M. E. et al (2012), "Beating and insulting children as a risk for adult cancer, cardiac disease and asthma", *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 29 September 2012

<sup>51</sup>Cheng, H. G. et al (2011), "Childhood physical punishment and the onset of drinking problems: Evidence from metropolitan China", *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 118, 31-39

<sup>52</sup>Fuh, J. et al (2010), "Relationship Between Childhood Physical Maltreatment and Migraine in Adolescents", *Headache*, 50, 761-768

<sup>53</sup>Affifi, T. et al (2013), "Harsh Physical Punishment in Childhood and Adult Physical Health", *Pediatrics*, published online 15 July 2013





## Damage to education

**Studies suggest that corporal punishment can have a negative impact on children's cognitive development.** The 2016 meta-analysis examined eight studies related to cognitive development and found an association between experience of corporal punishment and impaired cognitive ability.<sup>54</sup> Other studies have found associations between corporal punishment and lower IQ scores,<sup>55</sup> smaller vocabularies,<sup>56</sup> poorer cognitive abilities,<sup>57</sup> slower cognitive development,<sup>58,59</sup> and poorer school marks.<sup>60</sup> Similar associations have been found for school corporal punishment.<sup>61</sup>

**School corporal punishment violates children's right to education,** including by creating a violent and intimidating environment in which children are less able to learn. A 2016 review which drew on more than 20 studies on the effects of school corporal punishment found that it injures children, damages their learning and is linked with mental health and behaviour problems.<sup>62</sup> School corporal punishment is often a reason given by children for not attending or for dropping out of school.<sup>63</sup> It has negative effects on the quality of education in schools as a whole: research has found links between the legality of corporal punishment in schools and poorer test results.<sup>64</sup>

**The negative impact of corporal punishment on children's cognitive development and education may last into adulthood.** In some studies, adults who experienced corporal punishment as children were less likely to graduate from college<sup>65</sup> or to have high status and highly paid jobs.<sup>66</sup>

## Damage to the parent-child relationship

Corporal punishment inflicted on a child by their parents can severely damage the parent-child relationship. In the 2002 meta-analysis, all 13 studies on the topic found an association between corporal punishment and a decrease in the quality of the parent-child relationship.<sup>67</sup> The 2016 meta-analysis examined five studies on the topic and confirmed the association between corporal punishment and negative parent-child relationships.<sup>68</sup> Other studies have found that corporal punishment is associated with poor attachment by babies to their mothers<sup>69</sup> and with poor family relationships in adolescence.<sup>70</sup>

Corporal punishment can make children feel rejected by their parents,<sup>71</sup> and teach them to fear and avoid their parents: children report feeling hurt, angry and frightened of their parents after being physically punished.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>55</sup>Smith, J. R. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1997), "Correlates and consequences of harsh discipline for young children", *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 151(8), 777-786

<sup>56</sup>MacKenzie, M. J. et al (2013), "Spanking and Child Development Across the First Decade of Life", *Pediatrics*, published online 21 October 2013

<sup>57</sup>Straus, M. A. & Paschall, M. J. (2009), "Corporal Punishment by Mothers and Development of Children's Cognitive Ability: A Longitudinal Study of Two Nationally Representative Age Cohorts", *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 18, 59-483

<sup>58</sup>Straus, M. A. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>59</sup>Cuartas, J., McCoy, D. C., Grogan-Kaylor, A., & Gershoff, E. (2020). Physical punishment as a predictor of early cognitive development: Evidence from econometric approaches. *Dev Psychol*, 56(11), 2013-2026. doi:10.1037/dev0001114

<sup>60</sup>Cherian, V. I. (1994), "Self-reports of corporal punishment by Xhosa children from broken and intact families and their academic achievement", *Psychological Reports*, 74(3), 867-874

<sup>61</sup>Ogando Portela, M. J. & Pells, K. (2015), *Corporal Punishment in Schools Longitudinal Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam – Innocenti Discussion Paper 2015-02*, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research

<sup>62</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2016), *School Corporal Punishment in Global Perspective: Prevalence, Outcomes, and Efforts at Intervention*, Report submitted to the Know Violence in Childhood Initiative, Violence in Schools Learning Group

<sup>63</sup>Pinheiro, P. S. (2006), *World Report on Violence against Children*, Geneva: United Nations

<sup>64</sup>Center for Effective Discipline (2010), *Paddling Versus ACT Scores - A Retrospective Analysis*, Ohio: Center for Effective Discipline

<sup>65</sup>Straus, M. A. & Mathur, A. K. (1995), "Corporal Punishment of Adolescents and Academic Attainment", paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological, San Francisco, 7 April 1995

<sup>66</sup>Straus, M. A. & Gimpel, H. S. (1992), "Corporal Punishment by Parents and Economic Achievement: A Theoretical Model and Some Preliminary Empirical Data", paper presented at the 1992 meeting of the American Sociological Association

<sup>67</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>68</sup>Gershoff, E. T. & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016), op cit

<sup>69</sup>Coyle, D. D. et al (2002), "Stress, Maternal Depression, and Negative Mother-Infant Interactions in Relation to Infant Attachment", *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 23(1-2), 145-163

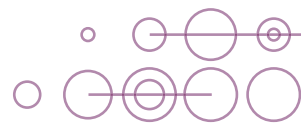
<sup>70</sup>Abolfotouh, M. A. et al (2009), "Corporal punishment: Mother's disciplinary behavior and child's psychological profile in Alexandria, Egypt", *Journal of Forensic Nursing*, 5, 5-17

<sup>71</sup>Rohner, R. P. et al (1991), "Effects of Corporal Punishment, Perceived Caretaker Warmth, and Cultural Beliefs on the Psychological Adjustment of Children in St. Kitts, West Indies", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 53(3), 681-693, cited in Straus, M. A. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>72</sup>Dobbs, T. (2005), op cit







## Corporal punishment and partner violence

**Corporal punishment and partner violence are closely linked.** Research has found that social settings in which corporal punishment is prevalent tend to be social settings in which partner violence is prevalent.<sup>73</sup> Corporal punishment and intimate partner violence often coexist: studies have found that parents in households where intimate partner violence was perpetrated are more likely to inflict corporal punishment on their children<sup>74</sup> and that approval of husbands hitting their wives is associated with a belief that corporal punishment is necessary to rear children.<sup>75</sup> Associations have been found between experiencing corporal punishment as a child and perpetrating violence towards a partner as an adult,<sup>76</sup> experiencing violence from a partner as an adult,<sup>77</sup> holding inequitable gender attitudes<sup>78</sup> and verbally coercing or physically forcing a partner to have sex as an adult.<sup>79</sup>

## Associations between corporal punishment of children and violence in society

The negative effects of corporal punishment on individual children and adults add up to negative effects on society as a whole. Ending corporal punishment is essential in both ending physical “child abuse” and in creating societies which are overall less violent.

Research suggests that the more a society uses violence for socially approved purposes (eg. corporal punishment of children), the more individuals in that society are likely to use violence for purposes which are not socially approved; and that the approval and prevalence of corporal punishment in societies is linked to the use or endorsement of other forms of violence, including fighting, torture, the death penalty, war and murder.<sup>80</sup>

Meanwhile, a study of eight non-violent societies found that, although they differed in many respects, one thing they had in common was non-violent childrearing, suggesting that corporal punishment is a risk factor for societal violence.<sup>81</sup>

In a few states which have prohibited all corporal punishment, the positive effects of the decreased use of physical punishment are becoming visible.<sup>82</sup>

- Research in **Sweden** has found huge declines in the prevalence of corporal punishment since prohibition was achieved in 1979.<sup>83</sup> A 2000 study which examined the impact of the ban found that there had been a decrease in the number of 15 to 17 year olds involved in theft, narcotics crimes, assaults against young children and rape and a decrease in suicide and use of alcohol and drugs by young people.<sup>84,85</sup>

<sup>73</sup>Levinson, D. (1989), Family violence in cross-cultural perspective, Newbury Park: Sage, cited in Straus, M. A. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>74</sup>Taylor, C. A. et al (2012), “Use of Spanking for 3-Year-Old Children and Associated Intimate Partner Aggression or Violence”, Pediatrics, 126(3), 415-424

<sup>75</sup>Lansford, J. E. et al (2014), “Attitudes Justifying Domestic Violence Predict Endorsement of Corporal Punishment and Physical and Psychological Aggression towards Children: A Study in 25 Low- and Middle-Income Countries”, The Journal of Pediatrics, published online 9 January 2014

<sup>76</sup>Gershoff, E. T. (2002), op cit

<sup>77</sup>Bott, S. et al (2012), Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: A comparative analysis of population-based data from 12 countries, Washington DC: Pan American Health Organisation & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<sup>78</sup>Contreras, M. et al (2012), Bridges to Adulthood: Understanding the Lifelong Influence of Men’s Childhood Experiences of Violence, Analyzing Data from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey, Washington DC: International Center for Research on Women & Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Promundo

<sup>79</sup>Straus, M. A. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>80</sup>Straus, M. A. et al (2014), The Primordial Violence: Spanking Children, Psychological Development, Violence, and Crime, NY: Routledge

<sup>81</sup>Montagu, A. (1978), Learning non-aggression: The experience of non-literate societies, NY: Oxford University Press, cited in Straus, M. A. et al (2014), op cit

<sup>82</sup>For more information on research showing reductions in the use of physical punishment in countries which have prohibited it, see <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/research/>

<sup>83</sup>Modig, C. (2009), Never Violence – Thirty Years on from Sweden’s Abolition of Corporal Punishment, Save the Children Sweden and Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

<sup>84</sup>DURRANT JE. Trends in Youth Crime and Well-Being Since the Abolition of Corporal Punishment in Sweden. Youth & Society. 2000;31(4):437-455

<sup>85</sup>Durrant JE. Evaluating the success of Sweden’s corporal punishment ban. Child Abuse & Neglect 1999 May; 23(5):435-48





- Studies in **Finland** have found that there has been a clear reduction in all forms of corporal punishment and other parental violence against children since prohibition in 1983<sup>86</sup> and that the decline in physical punishment was associated with a similar decline in the number of children who were murdered.<sup>87</sup>
- In **Germany**, which achieved full prohibition in 2000, research has shown significant decreases in violent punishment, which has been linked to decreases in violence by young people in school and elsewhere and to reductions in the proportion of women experiencing physical injury due to domestic violence.<sup>88</sup>

You can access our paper summarising research on the impact of prohibition [here](#).

## Conclusion

The evidence that corporal punishment is harmful to children, adults and societies is overwhelming – the more than 300 studies included in this review show associations between corporal punishment and a wide range of negative outcomes, while no studies have found evidence of any benefits.

Corporal punishment causes direct physical harm to children and impacts negatively in the short- and long-term on their mental and physical health and education. Far from teaching children how to behave, it impairs moral internalisation, increases antisocial behaviour and damages family relationships. It increases aggression in children and increases the likelihood of perpetrating and experiencing violence as an adult. It is closely linked to other forms of violence in societies, and ending it is essential in combatting other violence, including partner violence.

Meanwhile, studies of states that have prohibited and made consistent efforts to eliminate corporal punishment find not only substantial declines in corporal punishment, but also wider positive effects across society.

Respect for children's rights to protection, health, development and education, and a desire to move towards thriving, non-violent societies, requires that all corporal punishment of children be prohibited in law and eliminated in practice.

Briefing prepared by the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

[www.end-violence.org](http://www.end-violence.org) | [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org) | October 2021

<sup>86</sup>Ellonen, N. et al (2008), Lasten ja nuorten väkivaltakokemukset. Tutkimus peruskoulun 6. - 9. luokan oppilaiden kokemasta väkivallasta, Poliisiammattikorkeakoulun Raportteja 71/2008

<sup>87</sup>Österman, K. et al (2014), "Twenty-Eight Years After the Complete Ban on the Physical Punishment of Children in Finland: Trends and Psychosocial Concomitants", *Aggressive Behaviour*, 9999, 1-14

<sup>88</sup>Pfeiffer, C. (2012), "Weniger Hiebe, mehr Liebe. Der Wandel familiärer Erziehung in Deutschland", *Centaur*, 11 (2), 14-17, cited in Pfeiffer, C. (2013), *Parallel Justice – Why Do We Need Stronger Support for the Victim in Society?*, Address at the closing plenary session of the 18th German Congress on Crime Prevention, April 23, 2013

