

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT – PREVALENCE AND ATTITUDINAL RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICA



Global Initiative to
**End All Corporal Punishment
of Children**

Summaries prepared by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (www.endcorporalpunishment.org), March 2008

Note: No prevalence research identified for Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela

ARGENTINA

Research by Serpaj-Argentina and Don Bosco Hogares in 1998 into the conditions of detention in child institutions found that incarcerated children are regularly subject to disciplinary sanctions such as confinement in “chastisement cells” and corporal punishment.

(SERPAJ/Argentina, Hogares Don Bosco, 1998, *Informe carcel y ninos*, cited in World Organisation Against Torture, 2002, *Rights of the Child in Argentina*, OMCT)

An analysis of treatment of children in police stations and institutions run by the Province Council of the Minor between July 1998 and July 2001 found that torture and ill-treatment was systematically perpetrated against children, with 576 cases of such treatment being recorded during the period.

(SERPAJ-Argentina, Recopilacion de denuncias efectuadas por el Defensor del Departamento Judicial de San Isidro, Provincia de Buenos Aires, Noviembre 2001, cited in World Organisation Against Torture, *Rights of the Child in Argentina*, OMCT)

BOLIVIA

A study in 1997 on how children in La Puz, Oruro and Cochabamba perceived their rights, carried out by the Under-Secretariat of Generational Affairs with the support of UNICEF and the European Economic Community, found that seven out of ten children had been subjected to psychological punishment and six out of ten had experienced corporal punishment. According to Defence for Children International, 20% of the punishments had occurred on parents’ return from work, 14% in the context of marital disputes and a further 14% under the influence of alcohol.

(Reported in the third state party report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004, CRC/C/125/Add.2, para. 301)

BRAZIL

Research in five juvenile detention centres in the State of Rio de Janeiro found that beatings, and impunity for offenders, were common. Verbal violence was also common, and youths experienced lengthy periods of lock-up and being forced to stand for long periods of time in uncomfortable positions.

(Human Rights Watch, 2004, “*Real dungeons*”: *Juvenile Detention in the State of Rio de Janeiro*, vol.16, no.7)

Research by Human Rights Watch in 17 detention centres in Northern Brazil, including four girls and including interviews with 44 detained young people, found that children are routinely beaten by police. Beatings both during and after arrest were found to be common. Children complaining of beatings reported that military police hit them with rubber batons with a metal core.

(Human Rights Watch, 2003, *Cruel Confinement: Abuses against detained children in Northern Brazil*)

In 1999, research by the Child Studies Laboratory (LACRI), University of Sao Paulo, into the experiences of 894 boys and girls aged 7-15 at schools in Sao Paulo found a high prevalence of corporal punishment in the home. Among those aged 7-9 years, the most frequent forms of punishment were smacking, spanking and ear/hair pulling (41.51%, 41.92% and 36.79% respectively for boys; 32.76%, 24.14% and 27.59% for girls). Of those aged 10-12 years, between a quarter and just over a half of those who reported having received corporal punishment were still being beaten, and among those aged 13-15 who experienced corporal punishment, there was no form of punishment that had not been experienced by at least one child. Punishment is administered by both mothers and fathers, but particularly the mother the younger the child. Children aged 7-9 reported feeling predominantly pain and sadness when they were beaten; those aged 10-12 mainly pain and rage; those aged 13-15 mainly rage.

(Azevedo, M. A. & de Azevedo Guerra, V. N., 2001, *Hitting Mania: Domestic corporal punishment of children and adolescents in Brazil*, Sao Paulo: IGLU Editora)

CHILE

A 2006 survey by the Association of Chileans for the United Nations, together with Save the Children Switzerland, found that many parents admitted to frequent use of corporal punishment, most commonly in families of lower socio-economic status, and more commonly mothers than fathers; most also expressed concern about physical violence.

(Soledad Salazar Medina, 2006, *Estilos de crianza y cuidado infantil en Santiago de Chile: Algunas reflexiones para comprender la violencia educativa en la familia*, Asociacion Chilena Pro Naciones Unidas – ACHNU – PRODENI. Reported in *The Santiago Times*, 15 November 2006)

Research reported in 2000 involving interviews with 160 young people in conflict with the law found that 81% characterised their treatment by police as bad, 7% as average and 12% as good, contrasting with the situation once actually in custody where 11.3% said the treatment was bad, 27% average and 61.7% good. The most common forms of police abuse were repeated kicking (120 cases), followed by drenching with hoses (33), suffocation (27), hanging naked from a tree (17), forcing the head into a bucket of water (14), and the use of electric prods (11).

(Jimenez, M. A., 2000, *Adolescent Detainees and Minor's Justice*, UDP, cited in World Organisation Against Torture et al., 2004, *State violence in Chile: An alternative report to the UN Committee Against Torture*, OMCT)

In 1994, a survey of 423 parents from two public schools and 104 parents from a private catholic school found that child battering was admitted by 80.4% in the public schools group and 57% in the private schools group. This was confirmed by surveys of 192 students which revealed that 85% of children at one of the public schools and 54% at the private school reported having been physically punished. Striking with the hand was the most frequent form of corporal punishment, but 23.8% of the private school children questioned reported being beaten with a belt.

(Vargas, N., et al., 1995, "Parental attitude and practice regarding physical punishment of school children in Santiago de Chile", *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol.19, no.9, pp.1077-1082)

As part of the World Studies of Abuse in the Family Environment (WorldSAFE) cross-national project, researchers looked at incidence rates for corporal punishment using the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale, as self-reported by mothers covering the period of the previous 6 months. In Chile, “moderate physical punishment” was reported as follows: spanked buttocks with hand 51%, shook child 39%, twisted ear 27%, pulled hair 24%, hit with object on buttocks 18%, slapped face or head 13%, hit with knuckles 12%, pinched child 3%.

(Reported in Krug, E. G. et al., eds, 2002, *World report on violence and health*, Geneva: World Health Organization)

COLOMBIA

As part of a study of the impact of publicly funded early childhood education centres in Bogotá, the kinds of punishments used on children were examined. Interviews were carried out with 97 fathers and mothers and 97 children aged 5-6 years, in which 63% of parents reported seldom using physical punishment and 1% reported using it a lot. Of those who said they smacked their children, 47% said they used their hand, 44% a belt, 10% a slipper or shoe, and 2% a paddle or broom. In the four months prior to the interviews, the most recent punishment had been smacking for 32% and scolding for 11%. Interviews with the children revealed higher incidences of corporal punishment, including 83% reporting punishment by smacking. Various ways of being hit were reported by the children, including with a belt (70%), the hand (31%), a slipper (27%), a whip (5%), a paddle (5%), a shoe (5%), and a switch (3%). Reasons given for the punishment included disobedience (27%), not doing homework or poor performance at school (29%) and talking back or being rude (12%).

(Pineda, N. et al., 2005, *Evaluación de Algunas Modalidades de Atención a la Primera Infancia en el ICBF y el DABS*, Bogotá, Cinde, Save the Children UK, UNICEF, Colombian Institute for Family Welfare and Bogotá Social Welfare Department, reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

In a study reported in 2000 focusing on male perpetrators of physical child abuse, an analysis of reported cases of physical abuse, ranging from single bruises to third degree burns on children aged 0-17, found that in 80% of cases it was not the first time the abuse had occurred and in 55% similar incidents had occurred during the previous year. 91% of abusers had been physically punished as children; 58% felt the punishments had been justified. 62% of abusers used their hands, 66% used implements, and 17% kicked or punched their victims.

(Klevens et al., 2000, “Risk factors and context of men who physically abuse in Bogota”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol.24, no.3, pp.323-332)

In 2000, Profamilia carried out the National Demographic and Health Survey of 11,585 women aged 15-49 years, which looked at the kinds of punishments used by men and women. The study found that mothers were reported as punishing more than fathers, with less smacking and more scolding the higher the level of education. Punishments included smacking (47% by mothers, 42% by fathers or stepfathers), spanking (35% by mothers, 27% by fathers or stepfathers) and scolding (72% by mothers, 73% by fathers or stepfathers).

(Profamilia, 2000, *Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud*, Bogotá, reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

A survey in 1996 on the situation of children and adolescents, carried out by the National Department of Statistics (DANE) found that corporal punishment using a belt was practised in 16% of households; smacking or pinching was used in 13.3% of households; scolding and reprimanding in 39.7%; yelling and threats in 10.6%, and emotional blackmail (indifference and silence) in 5.5%.

(National Department of Statistics, Colombian Institute for Family Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, & National Department of Planning, 1996, *Encuesta sobre la Niñez y la Adolescencia en Colombia*, Bogotá, reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

COSTA RICA

In 2003, a survey by the Paniamor Foundation of 1,034 school children aged 9-16 found that nearly half (47.8%) experienced physical punishment occasionally in the home, while 4.2% experienced it frequently, more so for boys than girls in both cases; 11% said they had been punished in the past 15 days. The reasons given for being punished were mainly concerned with correcting behaviour: “they behave badly” (71.5%), “they don’t do as they are told” (22.7%), “to educate” (5.8%). Most punishment was administered by parents (mother 78%, father 77%), but was also given by grandparents (20%), older siblings (20%), uncles (19%), caregivers (16%), teachers (12%), domestic workers (9%), and the school principal (8%). When asked how they feel when they are punished, the most frequent responses were sadness (79.2%), pain (56.7%), fear (42.6%), guilt (39.8%) and loneliness (37.1%). The large majority of children viewed corporal punishment negatively, with almost two out of five children saying it is very bad and almost a third saying that people should not be punished in this way.

(Paniamor Foundation/Save the Children Sweden, 2004, “National Survey of Children and Adolescents on Physical Punishment”, part of project “Prevencion de la Violencia desde la Familia y la Adolescencia”, presented at Costa Rica, March 2004)

Interviews with parents in 1997 found that one in ten mothers and fathers always hit their child when she or he did wrong, six in ten sometimes; almost a quarter reported never hitting. Asked about objects used to hit their children, 41.8% of mothers and fathers said they always used a belt, 12.2% sometimes used a rope or cord, 52.5% always or sometimes used their hand, and 8.1% used a cane. One in ten said they punished their children every day and over a third said once a week.

(Barrantes, Z., Castillo, E. & Ortega, X., 1997, “Problems of child aggression and the role of the administrator teacher in the one-teacher (unidocente) schools of Circuit 1 of the Guapiles Regional Education Management in 1997”, Latina University, cited in paper on draft law abolition of physical punishment of children and adolescents, presented in Costa Rica, March 2004)

ECUADOR

In survey research in December 2000 on the situation of children in households, 40% of children reported that their parents hit them as a “disciplinary” measure. More than half the children in households in rural mountain areas and indigenous households reported ill-treatment by their parents (55% and 63% respectively). Almost half (49%) those in households below the poverty line described their parents’ behaviour and violent or punitive, compared with 34% in households above the poverty line. Ill-treatment by teachers as a response to misbehaviour was reported by 20% of children. Children in rural areas were more likely than those in cities to be punished by having recreation withheld or by receiving blows or insults or being ridiculed (25% compared with 17%), and boys were more frequently ill-treated than girls (21% compared with 18%). Ill-treatment by teachers was more common for children from households below the poverty line (22%) than those not considered poor (16%), and almost a third of indigenous children (29%) reported having been ill-treated by teachers. One in ten children reported being hit by teachers, with twice as many boys in rural areas as in cities being hit (14% compared with 7%).

(EMEDINHO/National Statistics and Census Institute/Ministry of Social Welfare/National Institute for Children and the Family/Centre for Population Studies and Social Development, 2000, reported in *Children Now*, Ecuador Integrated System of Social Indicators, cited in the second and third combined periodic state party report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004, CRC/C/65/Add.28, paras. 156, 173-176, and third report to the Committee Against Torture, 2003, CAT/C/39/Add.6, paras. 256-259)

GUATEMALA

Unofficial visits to the Observation Centre for Boys and the Observation Centre for Girls, together with interviews with previously detained children, carried out by Human Rights Watch and published in 1997, revealed persistent and widespread use of corporal punishment and abuse of children in detention, particularly at the hands of the Spanish organisation Rehabilitacion de los Marginados (REMAR) governing the boys' detention facility for serious or repeat offenders.

(Human Rights Watch, 1997, *Guatemala's Forgotten Children: Police violence and abuses in detention*, New York: Human Rights Watch)

MEXICO

Research in 1983 looked at two indigenous Zapotec communities in Oaxaca, one characterised as "peaceful", the other as "aggressive", and their disciplinary practices, using structured interviews with fathers and ethnographic and ethological observations, mostly within family compounds, of 48 children aged 3-8 years (24 girls, 24 boys). Structured interviews revealed that fathers advocated physical punishment of their children for various behaviours on average in around 50% of cases for the "aggressive" community, with 71% recommending its use for disobedience by sons, compared with 22% for the "peaceful" community, with 39% recommending it for disobedience by daughters. Ethnographic observations revealed the use of "minor" forms of punishment (knuckle raps, slaps, pulls, pushes) in both communities, and severe forms only in the "aggressive" community (beatings with sticks, ropes and belts, throwing rocks, kicking, and striking forcefully with the hand).

(Fry, D. P., 1993, "The intergenerational transmission of disciplinary practices and approaches to conflict", *Human Organization*, vol.52, no.2, pp.176-185)

PERU

In 2004, interviews were carried out with 870 female carers of children below the age of 10 years (95% mothers, 5% aunts, cousins and grandmothers) from six communities, as part of a project sponsored by Save the Children Canada and Save the Children UK to establish a community network for the eradication of corporal punishment. The majority (80%) believed corporal punishment necessary to educate their children; 52% believed ear pulling, slapping, or hitting with a belt or stick acceptable; and 20% believed corporal punishment helps children learn to obey. Just over a quarter (27%) felt that corporal punishment was not good but used it nevertheless, while only 16% stated that they did not use corporal punishment. In interviews with young children (aged 4-5 years), 96% reported having been physically punished for "bad behaviour".

(Base line project sponsored by Save the Children Canada and Save the Children UK in San Juan de Lurigancho – Lima, reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

In 2002, Save the Children surveyed 1,555 children and adolescents and 689 teachers, parents and other adults who work with children. Nearly half the children (48.2%) reported being "occasionally" punished in the home, 5.1% "frequently", 30.4% "never". The responses from adults were comparable, with 46.9% stating that they had been "occasionally" punished in their homes, 11.2% "frequently", and 23.5% "never". Just under one in five (18.8%) reported being "occasionally" punished in school, 1.8% "frequently", and 39.7% "never" – but 39.7% did not respond regarding school corporal punishment. Boys reported being punished more often than girls in school (23% compared with 13%).

(Reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)