

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



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

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All Corporal Punishment of Children
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CANADA

In a sample of mothers of preschoolers in Manitoba, 59% reported having used physical punishment in the previous two weeks.

(Ateah, C. & Durrant, J. E., 2005, “Maternal use of physical punishment in response to child misbehavior: Implications for child abuse prevention”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29, pp.177-193)

A survey of 1,000 people in an SES/Sun Media poll in January 2004 found that 64% support the use of force such as spanking by parents to discipline a child, though a wide majority oppose physical force being used by others. Support for spanking as a reasonable measure was highest in the West at 71% and Ontario at 62%. The lowest support was Quebec at 47%. Only 7% supported criminal charges for parents who spank their children; 7% also said that children should be removed from homes where their parents used spanking as corporal punishment; 5% supported both these measures.

(“Spanking poll backs ruling”, *Winnipeg Sun*, Manitoba, 1 February 2004)

In a sample of mothers of preschoolers in Manitoba and Ontario, 70% reported having used physical punishment at some time; one-third of those who used it did so at least once per week.

(Durrant, J. E., Rose-Krasnor, L. & Broberg, A., 2003, “Maternal beliefs about physical punishment in Sweden and Canada”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 34, pp.586-604)

A national postal survey of households with children under the age of 6, completed by 1,643 parents (698 married mothers, 698 married fathers and 247 single mothers), was carried out in 1998-1999. Overall, 51% of parents reported using physical punishment occasionally or more often (1% “frequent”, 39% “rarely”, 11% “sometimes”); 49% reported never using it. There was no difference between mothers and fathers in the use of corporal punishment, but single mothers were less likely to use it than married parents, and parents with low education were more likely to use it than those with high levels of education. It was more often used for children aged 1-5 years, but 40% of parents of infants under the age of one year reported using physical punishment on their babies.

(Oldershaw, L., 2002, *A national survey of parents of young children*, Toronto: Invest in Kids Foundation)

A 2002 survey found that 50% of parents reported that they or their spouse had “inflicted light corporal punishment, like a slap” on their children; 6% reported that they or their spouse had “inflicted painful corporal punishment”.

(Canadian Press and Leger Marketing, 2002, *Child Abuse Report*, Montreal, PQ: Canadian Press and Leger Marketing)

In a 2001 survey, 10% of parents reported that they use physical punishment when their children break the rules.

(Berger, E., 2001, *National Report on Inter-Generation Abuse*, Toronto, ON: Berger Population Health Monitor)

In a 2000 survey of university students in British Columbia and Manitoba, 75% reported having experienced parental physical punishment as children or adolescents. Of these, 37% reported being slapped on the head, 34% being hit with an object, and 18% being whipped.

(Ateah, C. & Parkin, C. M., 2002, "Childhood experiences with and current attitudes toward corporal punishment", *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 21, pp.35-46)

In a 1999 survey of Quebec mothers, 48% reported having physically punished their children in the 12 previous months by pinching, shaking or hitting the child on the buttocks. Acts of severe violence such as shaking an infant, hitting a child on the face or head, punching, kicking or slapping, or hitting with an object within the previous 12 months were reported by 7% of mothers in the sample.

(Clément, M. E. et al., 2000, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec*, Québec, PQ: Institut de la Statistique du Québec)

In the 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 69% of substantiated physical abuse incidents were identified as cases of physical punishment.

(Trocmé, N. et al., 2001, *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*, Ottawa, ON: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence)

In 1992, surveys on attitudes towards smacking were carried out in Toronto and Winnipeg. In the Toronto Area Survey, an annual survey carried out by the Institute for Social Research at York University, only one out of 229 respondents aged 18 years and over felt that physical discipline is never appropriate. In the Winnipeg Area Survey, an annual survey conducted by the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba, 30.4% of the 528 respondents aged 18 years and over were in favour of a law banning smacking, though if it were shown that the Swedish law had reduced injuries to children, this figure increased to 65.4%. About 25% felt that corporal punishment was never acceptable.

(Durrant, J., 1996, "Public attitudes toward corporal punishment in Canada", in Frehsee, D., Horn, W. & Bussmann, K-D., eds, 1996, *Family Violence Against Children*, New York: Walter de Gruyter, pp.107-118)

In a sample of Ontario parents, 85% reported having slapped or spanked their children and 20% reported having hit their children with objects.

(Lenton, R. L., 1990, "Techniques of child discipline and abuse by parents", *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology*, 27, pp. 157-184)

In a 1988 survey, 21% of parents reported that they use physical punishment (19% occasionally, 2% often or very often).

(Decima Research Inc., 1988, *Report to the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse on a nation-wide survey of attitudes toward child rearing*, Toronto, ON: Decima Research Inc.)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A telephone interview survey of 600 adults in each of the 50 states, carried out by SurveyUSA of Verona NJ in August 2005, found that overall almost three out of four (72%) supported the use of spanking as a disciplinary method (ranging from 55% in Vermont to 87% in Alabama), with almost one in four (23%) believing it acceptable for a teacher to spank a child (ranging from 8% in New Hampshire to 53% in Arkansas and Mississippi). Nearly one third (31%) believed it is acceptable to wash out a child's mouth with soap (from 23% in Hawaii, Maryland and Massachusetts to 46% in Idaho).

(SurveyUSA, Verona NJ, August 2005, *Disciplining a Child 08/24/05*, www.surveymusa.com/50StateDisciplineChild0805SortedbyTeacher.htm)

Federal statistics show that during the 2002-3 school year, more than 300,000 American schoolchildren were disciplined with corporal punishment, usually one or more blows with a thick wooden paddle. Sometimes holes were cut in the paddle to make the beating more painful. Of those students, 70% were in five Southern states: Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama and Arkansas.

(Reported in *New York Times*, 30 September 2006)

An ABC News telephone poll of a random national sample of 1,015 adults in 2002 found that overall 65% approved of spanking children, with 31% disapproving; 72% thought that teachers should not be permitted to spank children in school.

(ABC News poll conducted by telephone, 25-29 October 2002; fieldwork by International Communications Research of Media, Pennsylvania)

Official data on corporal punishment in US public schools for the 1999-2000 school year, released in February 2003 (and as at July 2005 the most recent available), reported that overall 342,038 students were subjected to corporal punishment. This is a drop of 7% from the previous survey two years earlier (taking enrolment increases into account), and continues a steady trend. Total US public school enrolment in 1999-2000 was 46,306,355. According to data for the 23 states which have not prohibited all corporal punishment in public schools, the highest rates for school corporal punishment were in Mississippi (48,627 or 9.8% of students), Arkansas (40,437 or 9.1% of students), Alabama (39,197 or 5.4% of students), and Tennessee (38,373 or 4.2% of students). Black students were hit at a rate more than twice their proportion in the population: they comprised 17% of students, but suffered 39% of paddlings; white students made up 62% of all students, but suffered 53% of the corporal punishment.

(US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *2000 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report*, analysis from the Center for Effective Discipline, www.stophitting.com)

A nationally representative sample of 991 American parents, interviewed in the mid-1990s, examined six types of corporal punishment: slaps on the hand or leg, spanking on the buttocks, pinching, shaking, hitting on the buttocks with a belt or paddle and slapping in the face. The study found that the overall percentage of parents using any of these types of corporal punishment during the previous year was 35% for infants and reached a peak of 94% at ages 3 and 4 years. Despite a rapid decline in use after the age of 5 years, just over half of American parents hit children at age 12 years, a third at age 14 years, and 13% at age 17 years. Further analysis found that parents who hit teenage children did so on average about six times during the year. Severity, as measured by hitting the child with a belt or paddle, was greatest for children aged 5-12 years (28% of such children).

(Straus, M. A. & Stewart, J. H., 1999, "Corporal Punishment by American Parents: National Data on Prevalence, Chronicity, Severity, and Duration, in Relation to Child and Family Characteristics", *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp.55-70)

A review of the research literature on child abuse in daycare settings, with an emphasis on identifying variables associated with victims, perpetrators and settings, found that physical abuse in daycare centres and homes most frequently occurred in the context of “disciplining” the child, and may have been supported by parental permission for corporal punishment.

(Schumacher, R.B. & Carlson, R.S., 1999, “Variables and risk factors associated with child abuse in daycare settings”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 23, no. 9, pp.891-898)

A 1995 survey in America found that 49% of parents admitted to disciplining their children by hitting the child with an object other than on the buttocks, kicking the child, beating the child, and threatening the child with a gun.

(Straus, M. A. et al., 1998, “Identification of child maltreatment with the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales: development and psychometric data for a national sample of American parents”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 22, pp.249-270. Cited in Krug, E. G. et al., eds, 2002, *World report on violence and health*, Geneva: World Health Organisation, p.62)

Other research has found that over 90% of toddlers are spanked or subjected to other forms of corporal punishment, and almost 50% of adults recall receiving corporal punishment as children.

(Straus, M. A. & Kantor, G. K., 1994, “Corporal punishment of adolescents by parents: A risk factor in the epidemiology of depression, suicide, alcohol abuse, child abuse, and wife beating”, *Adolescence*, vol. 29, pp.543-561. Cited in Youssef, M. S.-E.-D. A. & Kamel, M. I., 1998, “Children experiencing violence I: Parental use of corporal punishment”, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 22, no. 10, p.960)

In a survey of American primary care physicians, 67% supported physical punishment, with younger physicians more likely to support corporal punishment (63% aged over 40, 72% under 40).

(McCormick, K. F., 1992, “Attitudes of primary care physicians and pediatricians towards corporal punishment”, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 267, pp.3161-3165. Cited in Hesketh, T., Hong, Z. S. & Lynch, M. A., 2000, “Child abuse in China: the views and experiences of child health professionals”, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 24, no. 6, pp.867-872)