Introspection and Effectiveness of Spanking: A Study of Child Misbehavior and Child-Adult Relationship

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Introduction

- Spanking is a term used to describe hitting a child’s buttocks with the inside of the hand, and it is considered the most well-known form of corporal punishment (Giles-Sims, Straus, & Sugarman, 1995).
- 94% of American parents find it is necessary to implement physical force when disciplining (Lazere, 2008).
- Adults are more likely to use spanking is response to aggressive misbehavior, which is viewed as more appropriate than if used for passive misbehavior (Gershoff, 2002).
- Spanking is found favorable when it is routine without strong emotion (i.e. from a parent), however, misbehavior will not decrease if spanking is used on an impulse (i.e. from a babysitter) (Gershoff, 2002).
- A prudent use of discipline is a necessary tool in any child-patient relationship to ensure a responsive and supportive relationship (Baumrind, 1996).
- If babysitters are too lenient with disciplining, they lose control over the children and misbehavior is more likely to continue (Arnold, McWilliams, & Arnold, 1998).
- People have the belief that spanking is decreasing as a form of child discipline and is not considered appropriate or effective in either type of misbehavior.

Hypotheses

- Spanking will be more appropriate in a child-parent relationship and for aggressive behaviors.
- Spanking will be less effective in a child-babysitter relationship and for passive behaviors.
- There will be no interaction between type of misbehavior and child-adult relationship.

Method

- 2 x 2 Between-Subjects Design
- Type of Misbehavior (Aggressive vs. Passive)  Child-Adult Relationship (Parent vs. Babysitter)

Survey conducted online using Qualtrics

- 218 participants
- Average age: 26
- 76% female, 24% male
- Informed Consent
- Month of birthday gave random assignment to one of four scenarios

Scenario 1: Aggressive; Parent
- Participants provided four ratings (5-point Likert scale) and one personal opinion

Scenario 2: Passive; Parent
- General Survey Questions
- Debriefing

Scenario 3: Aggressive; Babysitter
- Effectiveness (2)
- Appropriateness (2)
- Best Form of Discipline (2)

Scenario 4: Passive; Babysitter
- Participants' Views of the Best Form of Discipline in Accordance to Whether or Not They Were Spanked

Results

Appropriateness of Spanking
- People perceive spanking to be more appropriate when performed in a Child-Parent Relationship than in a Child-Babysitter Relationship.
- Spanking used in both types of Misbehavior, Aggressive and Passive, was not considered appropriate.
- However, participants disagreed with the appropriateness of spanking overall.

Effectiveness of Spanking
- There is a minimal bias for spanking being effective when used in a Child-Parent Relationship than in a Child-Babysitter Relationship, but it is not significant.
- Spanking is not perceived as being effective when performed for neither Aggressive Misbehavior nor Passive Misbehavior.
- Participants disagreed with the use of spanking as an effective form of discipline.

Correct Discipline
- Discussion and Time-out were selected by the majority as the best forms to use when disciplining a child.

Discussion

- Spanking is seen as inappropriate to the general public because many adults do not want to be associated with anything related to child abuse (Gershoff, 2002), which could be a possible factor for why the participants viewed spanking as inappropriate.
- Spanking is perceived as neither an appropriate nor an effective form of discipline regardless of the type of misbehavior, possibly because it produces negative outcomes on children (Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007).
- Parallel with the results of this study, Arnold et al. (1998) found that it is hard to accept spanking as a form of discipline for babysitters because it is unclear to which degree discipline can be generalized to people other than the child’s own parents.
- Future studies should explore other methods of discipline because spanking is typically combined with other forms of discipline (Gershoff, 2002).
- Future work should implement a successive independent samples design to examine changes that occur within the public’s views of spanking over time.
- The major implications of this study suggest that spanking should not be implemented as a form of discipline.

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