

The downsides of corporal punishment and advantages of positive discipline in parenting

Family is a universal union which greatly determines how our life unfolds. In other words, in the family, a child builds his moral character, learns basic social values and ideals, meets the need for love, belonging and closeness and creates an idea of himself and others. It also represents the place where a child, for the very first time, encounters parental discipline, which is crucial for the development of their personality and reaching bio-psycho-social maturity. Therefore, parenting children is the most important, but also the most difficult task for every parent. Until recently it was considered that “a sturdy hand resolves everything”, however, in a contemporary global society, this disciplinary method more than ever occupies the attention of both the professional and general public, dividing each of them into diametrically opposed groups. It is common knowledge that corporal punishment involves the use of physical force in order to suppress a child’s undesirable behavior and to build parental authority. However, growing theoretical concepts and scientific studies indicate the harmful consequences that corporal punishment may inflict on the physical and mental health of children, creating many difficulties in the life functioning of a later adult. Therefore, the main aim of this article is to point to the basic characteristics of corporal punishment of children and its negative effects, as well as positive disciplining that offers many alternative methods of parenting that are available to parents. Authoress advocates the attitude in which physical punishment is a violation of children's rights that can harm their development.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006, paragraph 11) defines corporal punishment as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however, light. Most of them involve hitting (“smacking”, “slapping”, “spanking”) children, with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc.” Author Straus (2010) adds that the intention of physical force is to cause bodily pain, but not injury, and all for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behavior. But, isn’t our first association with the word bodily pain - injury? Do marks have to remain on the child's skin for it to be an injury? What will we do with the emotional injury that a child gets when corporal punishment is used on him? In this regard, research in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and New Zealand came to the same conclusion emphasizing that the majority of children pointed out that a smack “made them cry and feel scared, sad, unhappy, unloved, heartbroken or awful” (Dobbs et al., 2006, p. 139). In a study involving a sample of 108 mothers, two-thirds of the mothers changed their own disciplinary actions as a result of their child's reaction to being spanked. The main reason why most mothers stopped the use of corporal punishment was that they saw how upset their children were or because they realized that they had been using violence in an attempt to correct their child's behavior (Holden, 2020). Therefore, physical force is always a force and no matter what it carries a certain amount of injury, which

no child deserves to experience. Moreover, back in 1994, the authors Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman had made a typology of child victimization in which they included corporal punishment.

Globally, many countries have introduced in their legislative framework a prohibition on parents from applying any form of physical disciplinary punishment to children. That is still not enough when we look at that, worldwide, more than 65% of all children aged 2 to 14 experience physical punishment on a regular basis (UNICEF, 2019). These percentages are cause for concern, especially when we can consider that in reality, the percentages of parental corporal punishment are certainly much higher than studies can show. Several studies have shown that parents most value the opinions of experts such as medical workers, social workers and psychologists when it comes to the use of corporal punishment, but what is alarming is that the study carried out among pediatrics in the USA showed that almost half of them believe that corporal punishment is an effective method of discipline, while 42% conditionally recommend the use of physical punishment (Taylor et al., 2017). Meanwhile, another study points out that among 153 pediatricians, less than half of them are acquainted with the effects that corporal punishment has on the physical health of the child, and when it comes to knowledge about psychological consequences that percentage is 59.5%. Only 47% of pediatricians have advisory conversations where they counsel parents regarding to the difficulties they have when disciplining their children. (Bassam et al., 2018). How can experts in this field provide advice to parents if they themselves are not familiar with all the characteristics of corporal punishment? At this point, we can conclude that there is a great need to raise awareness not only among parents but also among professional workers.

Proponents of introducing a ban on corporal punishment state negative consequences associated with it and in support of that they point out ten of the eleven meta-analyses that show that parental corporal punishment is linked to

“decreased moral internalization, increased child aggression, increased child delinquent and antisocial behavior, decreased quality of the relationship between parent and child, decreased child mental health, increased risk of being a victim of physical abuse, increased adult aggression, increased adult criminal and antisocial behavior, decreased adult mental health and increased risk of abusing own child or spouse. Corporal punishment was associated with only one desirable behavior, namely, increased immediate compliance” (Gershoff, 2002a, p. 544).

Another main concern regarding corporal punishment is that its use can be associated with poor quality of parent-child relationships. Children, wanting to avoid painful experiences, miss out on building trust and closeness with their parents, which, as we know, are the basis of every relationship and healthy personal development. A longitudinal study of adolescents found that those who had experiences with corporal punishment were less warm toward, open with, and close with their parents (Gershoff, 2008). Needless to

say, as it is already a scientifically established fact, how crucial the connection between primary caregivers and children is for their further behavior, relationships and decisions they make in life.

Apart from the use of corporal punishment, there are other methods that are available to parents whose goal is also to correct the child's behavior and achieve a positive parental influence, but without the child having to go through physical pain and negative emotions. Frequently in ordinary discourse, discipline is mistakenly considered synonymous with corporal punishment, particularly when guardians utilize corporal punishment to rectify or alter behavior that they consider hurtful or unhelpful to the child and the environment (Žegarac, 2004). Therefore, in scientific studies and literature related to disciplining children and parental educational actions, we can find that the term "positive discipline" is mentioned increasingly (Nelsen et al., 2008). The Council of Europe defines positive parenting as "Parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child. It provides nurturing, empowering, recognition and guidance, which involves the setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child. Positive parenting supposes respect for children's rights and a non-violent environment, where parents do not use corporal or psychologically demeaning punishment to resolve conflict or teach discipline and respect" (ISPCAN, 2016: p. 22). Hence, positive parental discipline refers to

"praising children for desirable behavior; providing clear guidelines, suggestions, advice, and instructions for achieving prosocial goals and behaviors; using positive incentives to increase children's motivation to perform assigned tasks; providing suggestions and choices instead of commands that should control the child; responding favorably to the child's self-initiated behaviors" (Nešić & Popović-Ćitić, 2018, p. 248).

Various meta-analyses validate to the benefits that parents and children infer when their parents learn positive parental abilities, which incorporate less behavioral and passionate issues in children, moved forward parental honours, progressed parental mental well-being and less parental struggle (Sanders et al., 2014). In one study, in which a community sample of parents was attending free 7-week Positive Discipline, results demonstrate that participation in Positive Discipline parenting workshops was related to a diminish in authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, as well as in parental stress. Moreover, the discoveries show up to indicate a diminishment in externalizing-hyperactive behavior and an increment in scholarly competence, in children of parents attending the Positive Discipline workshop (Carroll, 2021). As mentioned above, corporal punishment carries the risk of transgenerational transmission of violence, which positive parenting can help reduce. Studies in New Zealand indicate that there is a developing body of proof that positive parenting is exceedingly successful in ensuring children from violence inside families. Advance to this, compelling proof is rising that positive parenting is viably contributing to breaking the cycle of intergenerational savagery (Save the Children, 2020).

The main goal of this contemplate concept is for parents to enable their children to develop self-control, the skills of emotional regulation and make decisions about their own behavior in that way, positive discipline helps children to understand that everything they do in life has certain consequences and that they must see the connection between their own actions, consequences and impact they have on others (Silm, 2013). An example of a positive discipline strategy that parents can implement is positive time-in. It is similar to a time-out in the part in which when children manifest an undesirable behavior, they get excluded from any further activity. The difference from time-out is that the goal of the time-in parenting method isn't a punishment, but reinforcement. The reason behind it is that exclusion from activities or sending them to their room only makes the children feel embarrassment and guilt. Time-in gives the children an opportunity to find their own safe space in which they can calm down on their own and in a way that suits their nature and personality. In this manner, the children learn a way to control their behavior when they are upset and furthermore master self-control and self-discipline (Nešić & Popović-Ćitić, 2018). Some other methods that are available for parents are positive reinforcement, redirection, show and tell, selective ignoring etc., which will not be further discussed as they are not the centre of this article.

Based on the aforementioned, we can conclude that there is a need for more scientific research that could indicate harmful consequences of corporal punishment and raise awareness of parents on the issue of positive discipline, but also the education of all experts who in one or another way come into contact with parents and children. Questions such as why, when, how and what are the consequences of using corporal punishment have occupied a lot of attention in the past half century, but still, to this day there is no agreement among experts when it comes to this issue. However, in the world of growing modern scientific research on the effects of corporal punishment, the justifications for its permissibility overall are not convincing. The global trend of countries implementing legislation that prohibits corporal punishment, although that number is not still great, indicates hope. Lastly, whatever method of parental discipline parents choose, it is necessary for parents to provide their children with warmth, security and love and send the message to the child that he is loved and deserves to find his own place in this world.

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