

# CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN AND CRIME IN ETHNIC GROUP CONTEXT

## Abstract

Use of corporal punishment by parents has been found to be associated with an increased probability of assaults and other crime, less internalized control of behavior, alienation, and other problems. However, these studies fail to specify the ethnic/racial context in which corporal punishment is used and therefore may not apply to poor minority group families. Deductions from cultural relativity theory, deterrence theory, and social disorganization theory all suggest the hypothesis that, for poor minority group children, parental use of corporal punishment to discipline children may be associated with a reduced probability of crime and delinquency. This hypothesis was tested using data on nationally representative samples of Afro-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Euro-Americans. The results indicate that use of corporal punishment is associated with a higher probability of crime among all three ethnic groups, regardless of socioeconomic status. The seeming contradiction of cultural relativity, social disorganization, and deterrence theory is resolved by a more inclusive specification of the deductions from these three theories. Implications for policies to prevent substance abuse, violence and other crime are discussed.

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Almost all Americans believe that it is sometimes necessary to spank children (Straus, 1991) or use other forms of corporal punishment.\*<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there are increasing misgivings about this view because of research showing that use of corporal punishment is associated with undesirable side effects, such as an increased risk of the child learning that physical violence is a morally appropriate way to correct wrongdoing by others. The applicability of those findings to racial/ethnic minorities has also been questioned. Some African-American community leaders believe that efforts to end corporal punishment are an imposition of middle class Euro-American cultural values in the guise of science (Daniel, 1985; Ealey, 1980; Hampton, 1987; Harris, 1992).\*<sup>2</sup>

## CLASS AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

The evidence on class and race differences in use of corporal punishment is inconsistent. The review by Bronfenbrenner (1958) found that lower SES parents use more corporal punishment, but an even more comprehensive review by Erlanger (1974) found as much or more by middle class parents. Nevertheless, it is widely believed that lower class parents, including African-American and Hispanic-American parents, endorse and use corporal punishment more than do middle class Euro-American parents. Part of the reason for the ambiguous findings may be that different aspects of corporal punishment have been studied. If the research focuses on prevalence rates for toddlers, there will be little difference because the rate is close to 100% among all ethnic/racial groups (Sears et al. 1957; Straus, 1991; Wauchope and Straus, 1990). A Los Angeles study by Alvy (1987) found that 82% of Euro-American higher income parents, 95% of Euro-American lower income parents, and 99% of African-American lower income parents used corporal punishment. On the other hand, differences between ethnic/racial groups have

been found when the study focuses on more specific aspects than the overall incidence rate. These include the frequency of use, the age it is continued to, the purposes for which it is used, and whether the parents consider it legitimate and have no misgivings. Among the families studied by Alvy (1987), although the differences in actual use of spanking were small, African-American parents expressed much greater approval of spanking and other corporal punishment because they believed it is necessary to teach obedience, respect, and right from wrong. Only 12% felt ambivalent about having hit their child, compared to 39% of Euro-American upper income parents. Similarly, Heffer and Kelley (1987) found that the mean approval rating for spanking was higher among low income than middle income parents, and higher among African-American parents than Euro-American parents.

#### HARMFUL SIDE EFFECTS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Studies of delinquent youth (e.g. Welsh, 1976), find that almost all have been subjected to extensive corporal punishment. However, those studies do not necessarily show that corporal punishment contributed to the development of delinquency because almost all children from their background might also have experienced frequent corporal punishment. Nevertheless, they at least show that frequent use of corporal punishment did not act as a deterrent from delinquency. Since a large proportion of the delinquents in those studies are from minority groups, the fact that corporal punishment did not deter from delinquency is also relevant for the question (to be reviewed in the next section) of whether the effects of corporal punishment differ according to the racial/ethnic context.

The harmful side effect that has been most extensively investigated is an increased propensity to interpersonal aggression and violence. One of the earliest and best studies (Sears, Maccoby, and Levin, 1957) found that children of parents who used corporal punishment frequently to correct misbehavior, had four times greater rate of being highly aggressive than did children of parents who rarely used corporal punishment. Eron (1982) and Straus (1983) found higher rates of aggression against other children by those whose parents used corporal punishment. Straus (1991) also found that the rate of physical attacks on a spouse and on non-family members increased in proportion to the amount of corporal punishment experienced when a child.

A problem with the studies cited above is that all are cross-sectional. Since most corporal punishment is in response to misbehavior of a child, the causal direction can be the opposite of that implied by these studies. Fortunately, there is one experimental analog study and five longitudinal studies. The experimental study (Fairchild and Irwin, 1977) showed two films with the same script except that one depicted corporal punishment by a parent and the other did not to boys in first grade. In a subsequent observation of doll play, the boys who saw the corporal punishment film had the dolls act out significantly more aggressive acts. However, this is far from definitive evidence because the parent in the corporal punishment film did more than just spank -- in addition, they hit the child with a paddle, shook him, and yelled at the child. The external validity of the study is also a question. As for the longitudinal studies, three found a relationship between corporal punishment and later aggression (Lefkowitz et al., 1987; McCord, 1979; Singer, Singer, and

Rapaczynski, 1984), whereas two did not (Johannesson, 1974; Sears, 1961), so the ambiguity remains. In addition, most of the research failed to adequately control for confounding variables such as low socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial minority group status, violence between the parents, and parental abuse of alcohol and drugs.

In a series of recent studies, Straus and colleagues found that use of corporal punishment is associated with eight other harmful side effects: (1) a higher rate of juvenile delinquency and (2) a higher arrest rate for adults (Straus, 1991); (3) an increased probability of being at or above the 80th percentile on a depression index and (4) an increased probability of having thought about committing suicide in the previous 12 months (Straus, 1992); higher rates of (5) alcohol and (6) drug abuse (Straus and Kaufman-Kantor, 1992); (7) alienation and powerlessness and (8) lower occupational/economic achievement (Straus and Gimpel, 1992). All eight of the findings are "net" of the effects of a variety of potential confounds such as socioeconomic status and parental alcohol and drug abuse, and violence between the parents.

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Although some of the studies cited in the preceding section controlled for minority group status, none allowed for the possibility of interaction effects by examining specific racial/ethnic groups separately. There are at least three theories that suggest that the effects of corporal punishment may be different for poor minority group children than for middle class Euro-Americans.

From a cultural relativity perspective, it has been argued that an emphasis in Afro-American culture on use of corporal punishment to secure obedience developed in response to slavery and Jim Crow (Alvy, 1987; Kohn, 1977; Peters, 1976; Young, 1970). In those circumstances it was a matter of life and death for African-American children to be obedient. Misbehavior could and often did result in being sold or lynched. This brutal reality required unquestioned obedience of children and this was achieved by corporal punishment. To the extent that use of corporal punishment remains an element of Afro-American culture, children of parents who do not use corporal punishment may perceive the parents as not caring or not loving, with all the negative consequences that flow from feeling neglected or rejected. Nevertheless, there is far from unanimity among minority group social scientists on the worth of corporal punishment. Hampton (1987), Comer and Poussaint (1992), and Earls (personal communication) all oppose spanking in any form. The parent education program Effective Black Parenting (Alvy and Maringa, 1987) argues that continued reliance on corporal punishment is a dysfunctional carry over of patterns based on slavery.

The theoretical perspective of Baumrind (1991) and Belsky (1991) is comparable to aspects of control theory and deterrence theory. They argue that the dangers of ghetto life, although different from the dangers of the plantation and Jim Crow, are equally lethal. Peer pressure to use drugs and participate in crime may require firm parental control. Corporal punishment may be the best means of achieving instant obedience because of its presumed deterrent effect. Children would know that from past experience that failure to obey would mean a "beating."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, corporal punishment may be necessary to deter

minority group adolescents from succumbing to the alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and other crime that surrounds them in the ghetto.

Bronfenbrenner (1985) and others present an argument that has much in common with social disorganization theory. They argue that because society, and especially the lives of low income minorities, has become increasingly unstable, there is a need for families to provide more structure and stability in the lives of their children, including a high level of engagement and firm discipline. Bronfenbrenner rejects corporal punishment as part of the firm discipline, but others such as Baumrind (1992a, b, and by implication, 1972, 1991) do not.

There is also some empirical evidence that can be interpreted as supporting the idea that the effects of corporal punishment may be different for poor minority group children. Hoffman and Saltzstein (1967) found that authoritarian parenting, including corporal punishment, did not have the same adverse effect on poor children that it had on middle class children. The findings of Dornbush et al. (1987) were similar. They found that, for the population as whole, authoritarian parenting (including use of corporal punishment) was associated with poor school achievement; but not for Hispanic males and Asians. Baumrind (1972) found that among African-American families, but not among Euro-Americans, the authoritarian families produced the most self-assertive and independent girls.

As in the case of the studies showing adverse side effects of corporal punishment, there are serious problems with these three studies that prevent concluding that, in the context of lower class life, corporal punishment has positive effects. There are specific problems with each of these studies, such as the fact that Baumrind's research is, as she says, "preliminary" because it is based on only 10 Euro-American and 5 African-American children. The most important problem is that none of the three just cited are studies of corporal punishment per se. Although corporal punishment was part of the child rearing practices of the parents classified as "authoritarian" and "authoritative" by Baumrind, neither her research nor any other that we have been able to locate, investigated corporal punishment per se. The problem can be illustrated with Baumrind's finding that the children of "authoritative" parents had a higher level of socially responsible and self-directed behavior than did children. However, their greater tendency to be socially responsible and self-directed may occur because their parents used a combination of firm control, love, and non-restrictiveness (the main defining characteristic of the "authoritative" group), not because these parents also used corporal punishment occasionally. In fact, the superior outcomes may be despite the use of corporal punishment. If the authoritarian and authoritative parents had been equally firm, loving, and non-restrictive, but left out the corporal punishment, they might have been even more effective in producing responsible and self-directed children.<sup>4</sup>

Given the weakness of the research on both sides of this important issue, there seems to be a clear need for additional research. The research reported in this paper therefore undertaken to test the hypothesis that:

Regardless of ethnic group, use of corporal punishment is associated with an increased probability of violence and other crime, and drug abuse.

This hypothesis reflects what can be called a "universal harm" theory of corporal punishment, as contrasted with the cultural relativity, deterrence, and social disorganization theories presented above.

## METHODS

### Sample

Although the study grew out of the literature on Afro-American and Euro-American families, Hispanic-American families will also be analyzed because, the contextual conditions of poverty and segregation apply to a large proportion of Hispanic families. The data was obtained from interviews with the nationally representative sample of American couples who participated in the National Family Violence Resurvey (Straus and Gelles, 1986, 1990). The survey included oversamples of Afro-American and Hispanic Americans. Interviews were conducted by telephone in the summer of 1985 (for information regarding the validity of telephone interviews in this survey, see Straus and Gelles, 1986:472; Straus and Gelles, 1990, Appendix). To be eligible for inclusion, the respondent had to be age 18 or older and either (1) presently married, (2) presently living as a man-woman couple, or (3) a single parent with a child under 18 living with the parent, including divorced or separated parents. The response rate was 84%. The number of cases used for each analysis depended on the ethnic/racial group and which of two types of data on corporal punishment was used.

The sample sizes for each analysis depended on the type of data used to measure corporal punishment. One type will be called "adult recall" data. This was obtained by asking respondents to indicate whether and how often their parents had used corporal punishment when they were teenagers. The sample sizes for the analyses using the adult recall data are: 847 African-Americans, 721 Hispanic-Americans, and 4,052 European-Americans.

The other type will be called "contemporaneous" data. This was obtained by asking respondents with a child under 18 living at home whether and how often they had used corporal punishment during the preceding year. When there was more than one child living at home, a random process was used to select one child as the "referent child" for the interview. The N's for these analyses are substantially lower because not all respondents had a minor child at home. Specifically it is based on interviews with 448 African-American parents, 427 Hispanic-American parents, and 1,890 European-American parents.

Further information on the sampling design and the characteristics of the sample is given in Straus and Gelles (1986, 1990).

### Statistical Analysis

Logistic regression (LOGIT) was used to test the hypothesis that corporal punishment is associated with an increase in the probability of crime and substance abuse. The LOGIT analyses were replicated for each racial/ethnic group, controlling for socioeconomic status.

The data available in this study permitted specification of a number of additional independent variables in order to control for possible spurious effects resulting from confounding with corporal punishment. The "adult recall" data analyses controlled for four variables: age of the respondent, family socio-economic status, gender of respondent, and the frequency with which the respondents parents hit each other. The "contemporaneous" data analyses controlled for seven potential confounds: age of the child, number of children in the household, gender of the child, socio-economic status of the household, gender of the respondent, amount of "reasoning" used by the respondent when dealing with misbehavior by the child, and the presence or absence of physical violence between the respondent and his/her spouse (see Methodological Appendix for specific questions). As a result of these specifications, the findings to be presented should be interpreted as showing the "net effect" of corporal punishment after controlling for the variables just listed.

In addition to these controls, it was also possible to control for the confounding of ordinary corporal punishment with "physical abuse" in the analyses using contemporaneous data. This was done by excluding from the sample any children who experienced one or more of the items in the Severe Violence Scale of the Conflict Tactics Scales (see appendix). Unfortunately, no measure of physical abuse was available for the adult recall data sample. Consequently, the hypothesized association of corporal punishment with later criminal behavior might be due to the inclusion in the high corporal punishment group of those who were also physically abused.

#### Measures Of Corporal Punishment

Adult Recall Measure. The data for ten of the 12 analyses were obtained by asking respondents "Thinking about when you yourself were a teenager, about how often would you say your mother or stepmother used corporal punishment, like slapping or hitting you? Think about the year in which this happened the most. Never, Once, Twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times, More than 20 times." This was followed by a parallel question asking about the corporal punishment the respondent experienced at the hands of his or her father.

This is far from an ideal measure because the validity and reliability of recall data on events that took place many years earlier is questionable. Despite this, the prevalence rates obtained by this method correspond closely to the rates based on two studies using contemporaneous data obtained by interviewing parents of teen age children (see below and also Straus, 1983; Wauchope and Straus, 1990). Both the recall data and the contemporaneous data show that over half of all parents use corporal punishment on a teen age child. While that correspondence is not necessarily evidence of validity, it does somewhat alleviate concern over validity. It also indicates that the data on corporal punishment of teenagers applies to the majority of American children, not a small deviant group. (This issue is analyzed in detail in Appendix A in Straus, 1992).

Contemporaneous Measure. The "Minor Violence" scale of the Conflict Tactics Scales or CTS (Straus, 1979; 1990b) was used to obtain information on use of corporal punishment by the respondents during the 12 months up to the interview.

The CTS measures three tactics used in interpersonal conflict within the family: Reasoning, Verbal Aggression, and Physical Aggression or Violence. The violence items are used to form two scales: one measuring "minor" violence (such as slapping and spanking) and the other "severe" violence (such as kicking and punching). For the parent-to-child data, the Minor Violence Scale is used as the measure of corporal punishment because all the acts in that scale are legal in every state of the U.S., and the Severe Violence Scale is a measure of physical abuse because the acts in that scale put a child at high risk of injury. The CTS is described in somewhat more detail in the Appendix, and in the references cited above. This measure of corporal punishment was the independent variable for the analyses using the Child Delinquency Index and the Child Aggression Index as the dependent variables.

### Dependent Variables

Each of the 12 dependent variables were coded as dichotomies by assigning a value of 1 if the behavior was reported as having occurred one or more times in the previous 12 months, and a value of zero if not. The Appendix gives the specific questions used or briefly describes and gives references for the instrument used.

### ETHNIC GROUP DIFFERENCES IN USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Although there were some differences between the three ethnic/racial groups, the more remarkable finding was the degree of similarity between the three groups. The findings are presented in detail in Straus and Camacho (1992), but can be summarized as follows:\*<sup>5</sup>

Just over half the respondents in each racial/ethnic group recalled being corporally punished when they were teenagers (50% of Afro-Americans, 51% of Hispanic-Americans, and 52% of Euro-Americans). The chronicity of corporal punishment was measured by the mean number of times the respondent reported having been corporally punished during the teen year in which it happened the most. The means were high for all three groups: 7.4 times for Afro-Americans, 7.5 times for Hispanic-Americans, and 7.8 times for Euro-Americans.

The contemporaneous data on whether and how often the respondent used corporal punishment on the referent child showed a little more variation by racial/ethnic group. Fifty two percent of African-American parents reported using corporal punishment during the preceding 12 months, 47% of the Hispanic-Americans, and 58% of the Euro-American parents reported using corporal punishment. However, about 90% of the parents of toddlers (ages 3 and 4) in all three groups used corporal punishment. The chronicity of corporal punishment varies slightly more in the contemporaneous data than in the adult recall data. Among those who reported using corporal punishment, the mean number of times was 7.1 for African-American and Hispanic-American parents and 9.0 times for Euro-American parents. More detailed data on age, ethnic, class, and gender differences for this sample are in Straus and Camacho (1992) and Wauchope and Straus (1990).

## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, VIOLENCE, AND OTHER CRIME

Table 1 summarizes the results of the 36 logistic regression analyses. The first row of each pair gives the odds ratios estimated from the logit functions, and the second row of the pair gives the "base rate" for each dependent variable, i.e. what proportion of each ethnic group reported each of the occurrence of each of the 12 crime measures.

(Table 1 about here)

### Assault

Assaults By Men. The odds ratio of 1.13 in the upper left corner of Table 1 shows that for Afro-American men, each increase in the the corporal punishment scale is associated with a 1.13 times increase in the probability of assault of a non-family person. The next two odds ratios in the first row show similar findings for Hispanic-American and Euro-American men. The second pair of rows give the findings for assault of a non-family person by women. Although the base rates are lower than for men, the odds ratio are similar, indicating that corporal punishment of girls is associated with a similar increase in the probability of assaultive behavior when an adult. Thus, for both men and women, and for all three ethnic groups, the findings in Table 1 show that the more corporal punishment experienced as an adolescent, the higher the probability that they physically assaulted someone outside their family during the 12 months preceding the interview.

(Figure 1 about here)

At first glance, odds ratios of 1.12, 1.13, and 1.18 may seem to indicate that, despite being statistically significant, the "effect size" is small. However, the cumulative effect of these small odds results in substantial differences because the odds ratio indicates the increase associated with each step in the eight interval corporal punishment scale. Figures 1A, B, and C show the cumulative effects of corporal punishment. These graphs also show the shape of the function and do so separately for those at the 20th, 50th and 80th percentile of the SES index (see Appendix).<sup>\*6</sup> The specification for SES is not necessary to test the cultural relativity theory, but it is for deterrence theory and social disorganization theory, because the deductions from both refer to being both poor and minority.

The upper line in Figure 1A shows that among low SES African-Americans, the probability of assaultive behavior in the preceding 12 months increases from about .15 for those who did not recall any instance of having been hit by their parents as a teenager to almost double (.30) for those who reported 30 or more instances of having been hit by a parent that year. The middle and the lower lines show lower rates of assault by African-Americans at the Median in SES and at the 80th percentile, but the relationship between corporal punishment and assault follows a pattern similar to that in the low SES group.

Figure 1B shows that Hispanic-Americans who experienced the most corporal punishment had an assault rate that is 2.6 times greater than those who were not hit as a teenager ( $.29 / .12 = 2.6$ ). The three plot lines overlap because for Hispanic-Americans, SES was not significantly related to assault.

Figure 1C shows that for Euro-American's, although the assault rates tend to be somewhat lower than for the other two ethnic groups, the predicted probability of assault is almost double for those who experienced the most corporal punishment.

Assaults By Women. The second pair of rows in Table 1 shows similar findings for assaults by women, but as expected, within each ethnic group, the base rate for assaults by women is lower than the rate of assaults by men.

### Arrest

The rows labeled Respondent Arrested show that, although the odds ratios are all in the predicted direction (i.e. each increase in the amount of corporal punishment is associated with an increase in the probability of arrest), none is statistically significant. This may be a reflection of the low "base rate," for arrest, and hence a small number of respondents who were actually arrested. Another problem with this variable is that the phrase "...for something serious," was omitted and the error was not discovered until after the survey. Thus, an unknown proportion of the arrests may have been for traffic violations.

### Child Delinquency and Aggression

The row for Child Delinquency shows that, for Hispanic and Euro-American children, but not for Afro-American children, corporal punishment is associated with an increased probability of delinquency. The Child Aggression row shows that for all three ethnic groups, the more corporal punishment the parents reported having used in the previous 12 months, the greater the probability that the child was classified as physically aggressive towards others.

## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

### Assaults On Spouses

The rows labeled "Husband physically assaulted wife," and "Wife physically assaulted husband" show statistically significant findings for all six tests of the hypothesis that corporal punishment is associated with an increased risk of physically attacking a spouse.

### Physical Abuse of Children

The strongest set of relationships in Table 1 are for physical abuse of children. The middle row of Table 1, Part B shows that experiencing corporal punishment as a teenager is associated with an increase in the odds of physically abusing one's own child. This is the only row in the Table where the findings for all three ethnic groups are significant at the .01 level. The odds ratios are also higher than most of the others in Table 1. The larger effect size for physical abuse is not surprising if one takes the view that physical abuse is part of a continuum that begins with corporal punishment. A theoretical analysis

and more detailed data on the relationship of corporal punishment to physical abuse is given elsewhere (Straus and Yodanis, 1993).

### Approval Of Spouse Assault

The dependent variables in the last two pairs of rows in Part B of Table 1 can be thought of as "criminogenic attitudes." The odds ratios show that, within all three ethnic groups, corporal punishment is associated with an increased probability of the respondent agreeing that "...there [are] situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a husband slapping his wife's face?" For approval of a wife slapping her husband, the findings for Hispanic and Euro-Americans are similar but the approval rates and the odds ratios are higher than for approval of slapping a wife. However, among African-Americans, the relationship between corporal punishment and approving slapping a wife was not statistically significant.

### CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND DRUG ABUSE

The last two rows of Table 1 show odds ratios supporting the hypothesis that, for both husbands and wives, corporal punishment is associated with drug use. However, the association is not significant for black husbands or hispanic wives.

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

#### Summary

The hypothesis that corporal punishment is associated with an increased probability of criminal behavior regardless of racial/ethnic group was tested using fourteen measures of criminal behavior by African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Euro-Americans. The findings seem to be most consistent with the universal harm theory because 35 out of 36 resulted in odds ratios that are consistent with the idea that the more corporal punishment the greater the probability of criminal behavior, and 30 (83%) of the 36 models tested were statistically significant. However, the hypothesis was supported more consistently among whites (11 out of 12 tests) than among Hispanics (10 out of 12), or blacks (8 out of 12).

These findings are noteworthy because, even though they are not based on an experimental manipulation, they are derived from a study that overcomes some of the limitations of many previous studies. First, the findings refer to large and nationally representative samples. Second, the analyses controlled for many confounding variables. As a result of these specifications, we know the adverse side effects manifest themselves regardless of socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic group, gender of the parent doing the punishment, gender of the child, age at which corporal punishment was used, number of children in the household, amount of "reasoning" used by the respondent when dealing with misbehavior by the child, or presence or absence of physical violence between the respondent and his/her spouse.

### Theoretical Implications

For the most part the findings support the idea of universal harm rather than cultural relativity. However, the findings can be taken as lending some support for cultural relativity theory because the hypothesized links between corporal punishment and crime was less consistently supported within the African-American sample. However, such an interpretation would have to ignore the fact that a significant relationship between corporal punishment and crime was found in over two thirds of the tests for African-American families and five out of six tests for Hispanic-American families. Moreover, the weaker findings for the African-American and Hispanic-American samples might occur because the forces producing the high rates of substance abuse and crime in black and hispanic ghettos are so powerful that it reduces the importance of whether parents use corporal punishment.

If one assumes the validity of the findings and also the validity of cultural relatively, deterrence, and social disorganization theory, the fact that the findings seem to contradict these important theories is a serious problem. The following paragraphs, however, suggest that the contradiction can be resolved by more carefully specified deductions from the theories.

Cultural Relativity Theory. This theory argues that parental disciplinary methods that are appropriate for socializing a child to adapt to one type of society may not be appropriate in a society that has a different set of values and behavioral expectations. If, for example, a society is characterized by close adherence to rules, parents need to emphasize control more than in a society that is more "loosely structured" (Embree, 1950; Ryan and Straus, 1957) or demands individual initiative and creativity. If the society is one in which physical fighting is needed for survival, either individual fighting or as part of an army, then (as in ancient Sparta or certain non-literate bellicose societies), use of corporal punishment is likely to prepare children for survival in such a society. However, the available evidence suggests that this will be accomplished at the cost of a certain amount of unwanted aggressive and violent behavior and psychological well being. Thus, Rohner et al. (1991) found that even in St. Kitts -- a society in which the cultural norms strongly approve of corporal punishment -- the more corporal punishment actually experienced, the higher the incidence of psychological problems such as low self-esteem, emotional instability, and emotional unresponsiveness. Cross-cultural comparative studies show that societies that are high in use of corporal punishment also tend to be high in frequency of warfare and violent interpersonal relationships (Otterbein, 1974; Russell, 1972). However, in the context of a post-industrial society, deductions from cultural relativity theory lead to the opposite hypothesis than has been argued on the basis of the presumed cultural appropriateness of corporal punishment. In a modern post-industrial society, children need experience in negotiation rather than physical violence. Since that is the case, one can deduce from cultural relativity theory that optimum socialization for life in such a society should emphasize reasoning and explanation and avoid use of corporal punishment.

Social Disorganization Theory. Social disorganization theory leads to the proposition that, in the context of a high level of social disorganization, parents need to compensate for the lack of structure and social control by a more

structured pattern of family relations and control than would be optimum in other settings in order to increase the probability of the child developing clear conceptions of right and wrong and avoiding demoralization. The findings of this study do not refute that proposition. However, they suggest that high level of supervision and control should not include control by use of corporal punishment. In fact, as Sears et al. (1957) have shown, children are more likely to develop an internalized conscience and control if parents monitor, inform, explain and, if necessary, use non-corporal punishment (see also Straus, 1992 Ten Myths).

Deterrence Theory. This theory leads to the proposition that, because of the intense peer pressure to participate in substance abuse and crime faced by ghetto children, the penalties for transgression must be certain and severe, and this is best accomplished by use of corporal punishment. However, deterrence theory also holds that for punishment to deter, the offender must perceive it as certain and severe. Neither of these apply to children at the age in which delinquency typically occurs because parents probably do not know about most of the child's transgressions. In addition, in the context of the fights and violence that pervade ghetto life, being slapped by a parent, or even paddled with a hair brush, is probably not very severe. Moreover, research on deterrence shows that informal sanctions such as the disapproval of family and friends are perceived as very severe (Carmody and Williams, 1987). Consequently, parents can use those types of sanctions and also non-corporal punishments. They are likely to be just as effective (or ineffective) and do not have the harmful side effects of corporal punishment.

### Policy Implications

It would be unrealistic not to recognize that non-spanking could be a disaster if parents take it to mean being permissive of a child's misbehavior. Children do need firm but loving control, as in Baumrind's authoritative group. But parents do not need to spank to achieve this. Some parents, if denied the opportunity to spank, will "give up" on trying to correct misbehavior, but that is likely to be the exception because most parents are so deeply committed to producing responsible children. They will drop the spanking but continue to use non-spanking methods of control, and they will be more effective parents.

A more likely danger is that efforts to correct misbehavior will shift from physical aggression (spanking) to verbal aggression (attempts to cause psychological pain by insulting or depreciating the worth of the child). That would truly be disastrous because psychological attacks have more harmful effects than physical attacks (Vissing et al 1991). Consequently, educational programs to end corporal punishment must give equal weight to ending verbal attacks on the child. Such programs are needed in any case because parents who spank frequently also tend to use the most verbal aggression.

There is a tragic irony in the belief that corporal punishment is necessary to bring up children who can resist the drugs, crime, and violence of ghetto life. From a macro-structural perspective it is ironic because corporal punishment helps to legitimize violence as part of ghetto culture (Baron and Straus, 1989; Straus, 1991). From the family-level perspective corporal punishment tends to undermine the very things parents, whether in the ghetto or

elsewhere, most want -- a child whose behavior is governed by internalized standards and "stays out of trouble." Instead, corporal punishment teaches that force rather than reason prevail, that even good people (i.e., ones parents) hit others (Straus, 1991). Moreover, use of corporal punishment inhibits the development of internalized controls and conscience (Sears et al, 1957), and tends to undercut the bond between parent and child that is crucial if parents are to exercise influence that will protect children from drugs and crime once children are "too big to hit."

## METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

### Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS)

The CTS (Straus, 1979, 1990) begins with the following introduction: "Parents and children use many different ways of trying to settle differences between them. I'm going to read a list of some things that you (and your spouse) might have done WHEN YOU HAD A PROBLEM WITH THIS CHILD. I would like you to tell me how often you did it with (him/her) in the last year." The physical aggression items used in the CTS are:

- Pushed, grabbed or shoved ..(child)...
- Threw something at him/her
- Slapped or spanked him/her
- Kicked, bit, or hit him/her with a fist
- Hit or tried to hit him/her with something
- Beat him/her up
- Burned or scalded him/her
- Threatened him/her with a knife or gun
- Used a knife or fired a gun

The response categories are 0=none, 1=one incident, 2=twice, 3=3-5 times, 4=6-10 times, 5=11-20 times, and 6=20 or more times.

The first three of the above items are considered "minor violence" and the sum of these items was used as the measure of corporal punishment in this paper. The remaining six items which are considered to be "severe violence," or "physical abuse" because they carry a greater risk of injury. If the parent engaged in one or more of the three minor violence acts, but did not do any of the things in the severe violence list, the child was classified as having been corporally punished.

There are major disputes about the boundary between legitimate corporal punishment and child abuse. The main item in dispute is hitting with an object. Many people, perhaps the majority of Americans, consider this acceptable. In fact, there are traditionally legitimate objects such as belts and hair brushes, and using them is legal in every state of the United States. The normativeness of hitting with an object also manifested itself in Wauchope and Straus (1990) comparison of this item with the three "minor violence" items.

The opposite dispute can be found concerning the exclusion of throwing things and shoving from the abusive violence list. Just as certain types of objects are traditionally legitimate for hitting a child, there are also types of objects which can be thrown. For example, one can throw a bucket of water, but not a pot of hot water. In general, one can throw objects which carry a small risk of injury. Pushing, shoving, and grabbing are among the most frequently used methods of inflicting corporal punishment. But this is often not realized by parents who grab and shove because it is frequently embedded in getting a child to go somewhere or come from somewhere. The example of a child who will not get out of the car, and is grabbed roughly by the angry parent and jerked out of the car with far more force than is necessary. The rough handling

part of grabbing the child is a type of corporal punishment, and as noted above, a type which is believed to be extremely frequent.

### Dependent Variables

The question numbers refer to the questionnaire used for the 1985 National Family Violence Survey, which is reprinted in the appendix of Intimate Violence (Gelles and Straus, 1988).

Assault Of Non-Family Member. Q57. Everyone gets angry or annoyed sometimes. How often in the last 12 months did you: C. Get into a fight with someone who doesn't live here and hit the person. Never, Once, 2-4 times, 5-9 times, 10 or more times.

Arrest. Q59a. Have you been arrested for anything in the past 12 months?

Child Aggression Index. Q23. Within the last year, did (REFERENT CHILD) have any special difficulties, such as:

- b. Temper tantrums
- d. Disciplinary problems in school
- e. Misbehavior and disobedience at home
- f. Physical fights with kids who live in your house
- g. Physical fights with kids who don't live in your house
- h. Physical fights with adults who live in your house
- i. Physical fights with adults who don't live in your house

Child Delinquency Index. Q23. Within the last year, did (REFERENT CHILD) have any special difficulties, such as:

- j. Deliberately damaging or destroying property
- k. Stealing money or something else
- l. Drinking
- m. Using drugs
- n. Got arrested for something

Approves Husband Slapping Wife. Q49. Are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a husband slapping his wife's face?

Approves Wife Slapping Husband. Q50. Are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a wife slapping her husband's face?

Husband Assaulted Wife and Wife Assaulted Husband. Both measures used the 6 "Overall Violence Scale" of the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979; 1990), dichotomized as 1 = one or more violent acts during the previous 12 months, 0 = no violence in previous 12 months.

Child Severely Assaulted. This measure is the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979; 1990) "Severe Violence Scale" dichotomized as 1 = one or more acts of severe violence (such as kicking, punching, attacks with a weapon) during the previous 12 months, 0 = no violence in previous 12 months.

Drunkenness and Drug Use. Q66. In the past year, how often would you guess you: a. Got Drunk  
b. Got high on marijuana or some other drug

### Control Variables

Family socioeconomic status. A SES index was computed using the factor score option with the Principal Components procedure of the SPSS/PC factor analysis program. Five indicators were analyzed: education of the wife and the husband, their occupational prestige scores, and the combined income of the couple. The analysis yielded a single factor which explained 43% of the variance.

Violence between parents of the respondent. The sum of Q31. "Now, thinking about the whole time when you were a teenager, were there occasions when your (father/stepfather) hit your (mother/stepmother) or threw something at her? If yes: How often did that happen? Never, Once, Twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times. Q32. What about your (mother/stepmother) hitting your (father/stepfather)? Were there occasions when that happened when you were a teen? If yes: How often did that happen?"

Reasoning used by the respondent when dealing with misbehavior by the child. This is the Reasoning Scale of the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979, 1990).

Physical violence between respondent and spouse. This was measured by the Husband-to-Wife Violence and the Wife-to-Husband Violence scales of the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979, 1990).

### LOGIT Example

(Table A1 about here)

## NOTES

1. Corporal punishment is defined as the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior. The most frequent forms are spanking, slapping, grabbing or shoving a child "roughly" (i.e. with more force than is needed to move the child), and hitting with certain traditionally acceptable objects such as a hair brush, belt, or paddle.

2. Despite this, they seldom make a direct statement in favor of corporal punishment. Instead, they discuss the importance of respecting the integrity of African-American culture which, in the context of their preceding discussion, is an endorsement of using corporal punishment.

3. In lower class language, the term "beating" is often used as a generic term to refer to any form of corporal punishment, starting with a slap; just as in middle class language, the term "spanking" is often used as a generic term to refer to all forms of corporal punishment, not just striking a child on the buttocks.

4. Kruttschnitt, Heath and Ward (1986) found that parental violence is more closely related to criminal behavior of minority children than white children. Kruttschnitt and Dornfeld's reanalysis of that data (1991) produced almost opposite findings, namely that "the extent of abuse is related to violent offending but only for whites." Important as these studies may be for other purposes, neither is informative about corporal punishment per se. In the first study cited, corporal punishment is only one item in a "parental violence" index. Findings based on this index can be the effect of the other items in the index, such as violence between the parents, severe assaults on the child (i.e. "physical abuse") and frequency of father losing his temper. In the second study cited, use of corporal punishment is one category in a three category index of child abuse and the data are not presented separately for the "corporal punishment only" cases. Consequently, there is no way of knowing what role, if any, ordinary corporal punishment played in producing these findings.

5. The data on use of corporal punishment in the following paragraphs differs somewhat from that reported in Straus and Camacho because some cases had to be dropped from the study due to missing data on one or more of the dependent or control variables used in the regression analyses.

6. The results are displayed for the 20th percentile, i.e., the lowest fifth of American families in socioeconomic status, because the theory being tested applies to low SES families. Results similar to those shown were also found for the 10th percentile.

Table A1 in the appendix gives the full set of logistic regression results from which Figure 1 was computed. The same information is available for all 36 LOGIT models. They are not included in the appendix because it would require a large amount of space, but copies will be supplied on request to the first author.

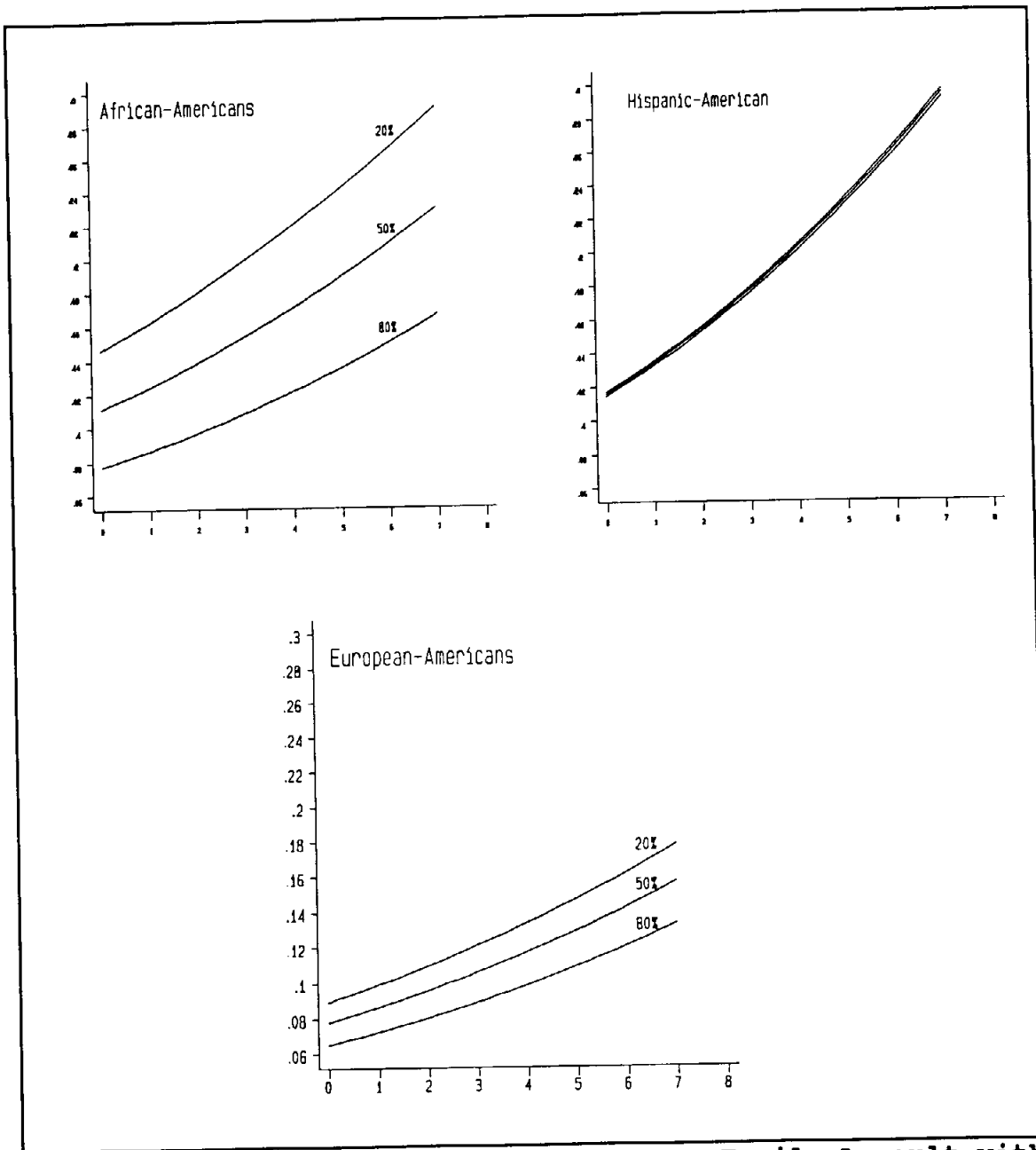
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**Figure 1 Predicted Probability of a Non-Family Assault with Increases in Corporal Punishment. Graphs Display effects at 20<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 80<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the Socioeconomic Status Variable.**

Table 1. Logistic Regression Analysis: Base Rates, Odds Ratios and Significance Levels by Racial/Ethnic Group

Dependent Variable		Black	Hisp	White
<u>A. NON-FAMILY VIOLENCE AND OTHER CRIME</u>				
Assault of non-family person 1+ times by men <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.13* 13%	1.18* 13%	1.12** 10%
Assault of non-family person 1+ times by women <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.14* 11%	1.20* 8%	1.12** 6%
Respondent arrested <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.26 3%	1.14 1%	1.09 2%
Child Aggression Index of 1+	Odds Rate	1.05* 19%	1.08** 17%	1.05** 17%
Child Delinquency Index score of 1+	Odds Rate	0.93 2%	1.11* 3%	1.06** 2%
<u>B. ASSAULTS ON SPOUSES AND CHILDREN VIOLENCE</u>				
Husband physically assaulted wife 1+ times <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.16* 17%	1.35** 18%	1.17** 11%
Wife physically assaulted husband 1+ times <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.18** 21%	1.27** 17%	1.15** 12%
Respondent severely assaulted child 1+ times <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.26** 19%	1.40** 15%	1.21** 10%
Approves husband slapping wife in some situations	Odds Rate	1.17* 10%	1.15* 16%	1.11** 13%
Approves wife slapping husband in some situations	Odds Rate	1.10 18%	1.24*** 23%	1.14** 21%
<u>C. DRUG ABUSE</u>				
Husband used drugs 1 or more times <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.12 9%	1.23* 6%	1.20** 8%
Wife used drugs 1 or more times <sup>#</sup>	Odds Rate	1.19* 6%	1.20 2%	1.08* 6%

<sup>#</sup> In the 12 months preceeding the interview

<sup>##</sup> The odds ratio is the

\* = p <.05, \*\* = p <.01

Appendix Table 1. Logistic regression analysis for Table 2, row 1 (Husband assaulted non-family person 1+ times), column 1 (African-American sample).

Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std Err.	t	p <	[95% Conf.Interval]	
Corporal Punishment	1.131	.079	1.769	0.078	.986	1.299
Age of Respondent	.942	.012	-4.500	0.001	.918	.967
Socioeconomic Status	.977	.008	-2.501	0.013	.960	.995
Sex of Respondent	.689	.200	-1.279	0.201	.389	1.220
Violence between respondent's parents	1.009	.023	0.387	0.699	.963	1.057

N = 487, chi-square (5) = 34.39 (p <.001)  
 Log Likelihood = -172.280, Pseudo R2 = 0.091