BEATING
THE DEVIL
OUT OF
THEM

Corporal Punishment in American Families

MURRAY A. STRAUS
Beating the Devil Out of Them
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN AMERICAN FAMILIES
AND ITS EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

Murray A. Straus
With a new introduction and Concluding Chapter

Based on his studies of over 9,000 families, Murray A Straus, the foremost researcher on family violence in the world, discusses the extent to which parents in the United States use corporal punishment (such as spanking and slapping) and its effects on their children. The question of whether corporal punishment is an effective method of discipline is hotly debated. Straus contends that this believed-to-be-“minor” form of physical violence is precursor to much violence that plagues our world.

Children who are spanked quickly learn that love and violence can go hand in hand. Since spanking is generally done by loving, caring parents—for the child’s own good—a child can learn that hitting is “morally right.” Straus describes what he has learned through two decades of research: children who are spanked are from two to six times more likely to be physically aggressive, to become juvenile delinquents, and later, as adults, to use physical violence against their spouses, to have sadomasochistic tendencies, and to suffer from depression. Straus alerts parents to these risks, and argues that spanking adversely affects not only the children who are subjected to it but society as a whole.

This groundbreaking book, now available in paperback with a substantive new introduction and new concluding chapter, is essential reading for parents as well as teachers, lawyers, and judges. Professionals in fields such as social work, child protection, delinquency and criminology, psychology, and politics will find it of critical importance.

“A comprehensive exposé of the corporal punishment controversy by an eminent scholar. Straus provides the long needed scientific evidence linking corporal punishment to subsequent violence and other adult problems. This book gives major new importance and credibility to the uphill effort to end corporal punishment of children.”

—Adrienne Ahlgren Haeuser, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

“Murray Straus has exposed ‘the best kept secret of American child psychology’: hitting kids is the dark force in family life. Just as smoking was accepted a generation ago, corporal punishment is still okay in polite society. However, like smoking, hitting emerges as a destructive anti-social act with serious costs to public health.”

—James Garbarino, Cornell University

Murray A. Straus is founder and co-director of the Family Research Lab at the University of New Hampshire. He is the co-author of Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families, also available from Transaction.

Childcare • Sociology
"As concern mounts over rising levels of violence in society, especially amongst the young, so do calls for more corporal punishment. But violence leads to violence and spanking and paddling are violence. If we want a non-violent society we have to root out the long tradition of physical punishment and learn to discipline children with our heads and hearts rather than with our hands and belts. Many of us have said it. Now, at last, Murray A. Straus proves it."
—Penelope Leach, Ph.D., author of Your Baby

"A timely and important book. It makes the association between intrafamily violent behavior toward children and future violent behavior in those children. We can no longer use physical violence with our children as a means of discipline. We live in a violent society and every time we strike a child, we are passing on the message that violence is a way to settle issues. It is not."
—T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.

"A landmark book...Straus has combined the passion of humane and compassionate values with the hard statistical data of the social scientist to convince even the most skeptical advocate of corporal punishments that this practice is the true seedbed of violence and aggression in our nation and world."
—Philip Greven, author of Spare the Child

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—Adrienne Ahlgren Haeuser, Professor, School of Social Welfare, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

"Just as smoking was accepted a generation ago, corporal punishment is still okay in polite society. However, like smoking, hitting emerges as a destructive anti-social act with serious costs to public health. Every professional ought to be required to master this book before venturing into the world of parent education or counseling."
—James Garbarino, Ph.D., Director, Family Life Development Center, Cornell University; author of Children and Families in the Social Environment
Contents

Preface ix
Acknowledgments xv

PART I
SPANKING—THE VIRTUOUS VIOLENCE

1 The Conspiracy of Silence 3
What Is Corporal Punishment? 4
The Importance of Corporal Punishment 9
A Conspiracy of Silence 10
Child-Rearing Advice Books 14
Plan of the Book 16

2 Everyone Does It, But Less Now 19
The Virtuous Violence 19
Attitudes Toward Corporal Punishment 20
How Much Corporal Punishment? 22
Corporal Punishment In Two Nationally Representative
   Samples 22
Trends 25
Differences Between Boys and Girls 29
Cultural Discontinuity in Corporal Punishment 31
Conclusions 32

3 Hitting Adolescents 35
Two Measures of Corporal Punishment 36
How Many Are Hit and How Often? 37
The Social Context of Hitting Adolescents 39
Conclusions 47
4 Who Spanks the Most?
   Cultural Norms and Attitudes  51
   The Age and Sex of the Child  54
   Parents and Family Characteristics  54
   Conclusions  61

PART II
THE PRICE OF VIRTUE

5 Depression and Suicide
   Depression  67
   Corporal Punishment and Depressions  71
   Corporal Punishment and Suicidal Thoughts  72
   Summary  77
   Why Does Corporal Punishment Produce Depression?  78

6 Physical Abuse
   Another Conspiracy of Silence  82
   The Research Evidence  83
   Reasons for Ignoring Corporal Punishment  87
   Theories That Might Explain the Link  90
   Characteristics of Abusing Parents  91
   Corporal Punishment and Physical Abuse  92
   Conclusions  95

7 Violence and Crime
   Corporal Punishment and Family Violence  101
   Corporal Punishment and Street Crime  107
   Corporal Punishment in Schools and Violence  110
   Socio-Cultural Context  116
   Conclusions  117

8 The Fusion of Sex and Violence
   Lovemaps  124
   Sexual Scripts and Other Influences  125
   Masochistic Sex Among College Men and Women  126
   Corporal Punishment and Masochistic Sex  130
   Conclusions  134
9 Alienation and Reduced Income
Corporal Punishment and Achievement 140
Alienation 142
Conclusions 144

PART III
THE FUTURE

10 Ten Myths That Perpetuate Corporal Punishment 149
Myth 1: Spanking Works Better 149
Myth 2: Spanking Is Needed as a Last Resort 152
Myth 3: Spanking Is Harmless 152
Myth 4: One or Two Times Won’t Cause Any Damage 155
Myth 5: Parents Can’t Stop Without Help 155
Myth 6: If You Don’t Spank, Your Children Will Be
Spoiled or Run Wild 157
Myth 7: Parents Spank Rarely or Only for
Serious Problems 160
Myth 8: By the Time a Child Is a Teenager, Parents
Have Stopped 160
Myth 9: If Parents Don’t Spank, They Will Verbally Abuse
Their Child 161
Myth 10: It Is Unrealistic to Expect Parents to
Never Spank 161
Why Do These Myths Persist? 162

11 Social Evolution and Corporal Punishment 165
How Solid is the Evidence? 165
Corporal Punishment in Historical Perspective 169
A Moral Passage 170
Social Changes Underlying the Moral Passage 173
Lessons from the Swedish No-Spanking Law 179
Obstacles to Ending Corporal Punishment 182
A Society Without Corporal Punishment 186

Appendix
A. A Theoretical Model 189
B. Samples and Measures of Corporal Punishment 199
C. Statistical Methods and Measures 217
D. Books on Child Abuse Searched for Discussions of
Corporal Punishment 255

Notes 261
References 267
Index 285