

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



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

Summaries prepared by the Global Initiative to End
All Corporal Punishment of Children
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Note: No prevalence research identified for Cuba, El Salvador, Uruguay. No prevalence research in the last ten years identified for Ecuador, Guatemala.

ARGENTINA

A report on the human rights violations perpetrated against approximately 25,000 people – children and adults – detained in Argentina’s psychiatric institutions – documented many beatings and prolonged use of isolation in cells.

(Mental Disability Rights International & Center for Legal and Social Studies, 2007, *Ruined Lives: Segregation from Society in Argentina’s Psychiatric Asylums*)

Surveys carried out in 2002-2004 examined the attitudes of children and adults in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela towards physical punishment. In Argentina, 293 people were surveyed (201 adults and 89 children). Nearly a third (32.6%) of the children and over half of the adults (52.1%) agreed that children should not be physically punished or that “punishment does not solve anything”, and 27% of children and 15.6% of adults agreed that physical punishment is “very bad” or “makes children violent”. Over half (53.9%) of children and 79.6% of adults thought that physical punishment is never necessary.

(Save the Children Sweden & Instituto de Encuestas y Sondeos de Opinión, 2005, *Sistematización de las Encuestas Sobre la Percepción del Castigo Físico en Seis Países de America Latina*, presentation: Managua, 16 May 2005)

BOLIVIA

According to UN statistics, in 2003 significant proportions of women believed that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for specific reasons: 5% for burning the food, 6% for arguing with him, 9% for going out without telling him, 17% for neglecting the children and 3% for refusing to have sex.

(United Nations, 2010, *The World’s Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

BRAZIL

A report comparing diagnosis and treatment of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) in different countries found that in Brazil, physical punishment is considered by a large number of teachers to be a “therapeutic” treatment for ADHD.

(Reported in *Psychiatric News*, vol. 46, no. 11, June 3, 2011)

A large scale comparative study (World Studies of Abuse in the Family Environment (WorldSAFE)) which involved surveys with over 14,000 mothers of children aged under 18, carried out between 1998 and 2003, examined parental discipline in Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Philippines, and the United States. In Brazil, 70% of children experienced “moderate” physical discipline (including being “spanked” on the buttocks, hit with an object, slapped on the face and having hot pepper put in their mouth). Two per cent of children experienced harsh physical discipline (including being burnt, beaten up, kicked and smothered). Nearly four children in ten (39%) experienced harsh psychological discipline such as being called names, being cursed and being threatened with abandonment. “Moderate” psychological discipline, including being yelled or screamed at or being refused food was experienced by 77% of children. Non-violent discipline, including explaining why a behaviour was wrong and telling a child to stop, was also widely used (experienced by 96% of children). The study found that rates of harsh physical discipline were dramatically higher in all communities than published rates of official physical abuse in any country, and that rates of physical punishment can vary widely among communities within the same country.

(Runyan, D. et al, 2010, “International Variations in Harsh Child Discipline”, *Pediatrics*, published online 2 August 2010, www.pediatrics.org)

A study on the relationship between severe physical punishment and mental health problems found that 20% of the children (aged 6-17) in the 813 participating households had suffered severe physical punishment (being hit with an object, being kicked, choked, smothered, burnt, scalded, branded, beaten or threatened with a weapon) by one or both parents in the last 12 months.

(Bordin, I. A. et al, 2009, “Severe physical punishment: risk of mental health problems for poor urban children in Brazil”, *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, May 2009, vol. 87(5), pp. 336–344)

Surveys carried out in 2002-2004 examined the attitudes of children and adults in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela towards physical punishment. In Brazil, 800 people were surveyed (200 adults and 600 children). Nearly a quarter (23.2%) of the children agreed that physical punishment is “very bad” or “makes children violent”, and 37.2% agreed that physical punishment is “unfair”. Three-quarters of children and adults thought that physical punishment is never necessary.

(Save the Children Sweden & Instituto de Encuestas y Sondeos de Opinión, 2005, *Sistematización de las Encuestas Sobre la Percepción del Castigo Físico en Seis Países de America Latina*, presentation: Managua, 16 May 2005)

Research in five juvenile detention centres in the State of Rio de Janeiro found that beatings, and impunity for offenders, were common. Verbal violence was also common, and youths experienced

lengthy periods of lock-up and being forced to stand for long periods of time in uncomfortable positions.

(Human Rights Watch, 2004, “*Real dungeons*”: *Juvenile Detention in the State of Rio de Janeiro*, vol.16, no.7)

Research by Human Rights Watch in 17 detention centres in Northern Brazil, including four girls and including interviews with 44 detained young people, found that children are routinely beaten by police. Beatings both during and after arrest were found to be common. Children complaining of beatings reported that military police hit them with rubber batons with a metal core.

(Human Rights Watch, 2003, *Cruel Confinement: Abuses against detained children in Northern Brazil*)

CHILE

A large scale comparative study (World Studies of Abuse in the Family Environment (WorldSAFE)) which involved surveys with over 14,000 mothers of children aged under 18, carried out between 1998 and 2003, examined parental discipline in Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Philippines, and the United States. In Chile, 69% of children experienced “moderate” physical discipline (including being “spanked” on the buttocks, hit with an object, slapped on the face and having hot pepper put in their mouth). Nearly one child in twenty (4.5%) experienced harsh physical discipline (including being burnt, beaten up, kicked and smothered). Nearly a third of children (32%) experienced harsh psychological discipline such as being called names, being cursed and being threatened with abandonment. “Moderate” psychological discipline, including being yelled or screamed at or being refused food was experienced by 85% of children. Non-violent discipline, including explaining why a behaviour was wrong and telling a child to stop, was also widely used (experienced by 97% of children). The study found that rates of harsh physical discipline were dramatically higher in all communities than published rates of official physical abuse in any country, and that rates of physical punishment can vary widely among communities within the same country.

(Runyan, D. et al, 2010, “International Variations in Harsh Child Discipline”, *Pediatrics*, published online 2 August 2010, www.pediatrics.org)

A 2006 survey by the Association of Chileans for the United Nations, together with Save the Children Switzerland, found that many parents admitted to frequent use of corporal punishment, most commonly in families of lower socio-economic status, and more commonly mothers than fathers; most also expressed concern about physical violence.

(Soledad Salazar Medina, 2006, *Estilos de crianza y cuidado infantil en Santiago de Chile: Algunas reflexiones para comprender la violencia educativa en la familia*, Asociacion Chilena Pro Naciones Unidas – ACHNU – PRODENI. Reported in *The Santiago Times*, 15 November 2006)

COLOMBIA

A study of the relationship between gender and physical punishment in China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand and the US, which used interviews with around 4,000 mothers, fathers and children aged 7-10, found that in Colombia 68% of girls and 63% of boys involved in the study had experienced “mild” corporal punishment (spanking, hitting, or slapping with a bare hand;

hitting or slapping on the hand, arm, or leg; shaking; or hitting with an object), and 15% of girls and 4% of boys had experienced severe corporal punishment (hitting or slapping the child on the face, head, or ears; beating the child repeatedly with an implement) by someone in their household in the past month. Smaller percentages of parents believed it was necessary to use corporal punishment to bring up their child: for girls, 14% of mothers and 13% of fathers believed it was necessary; for boys, 19% of mothers and 8% of fathers believed it was necessary.

(Lansford, J. et al, 2010, “Corporal Punishment of Children in Nine Countries as a Function of Child Gender and Parent Gender”, *International Journal of Pediatrics*)

As part of a study of the impact of publicly funded early childhood education centres in Bogotá, the kinds of punishments used on children were examined. Interviews were carried out with 97 fathers and mothers and 97 children aged 5-6 years, in which 63% of parents reported seldom using physical punishment and 1% reported using it a lot. Of those who said they smacked their children, 47% said they used their hand, 44% a belt, 10% a slipper or shoe, and 2% a paddle or broom. In the four months prior to the interviews, the most recent punishment had been smacking for 32% and scolding for 11%. Interviews with the children revealed higher incidences of corporal punishment, including 83% reporting punishment by smacking. Various ways of being hit were reported by the children, including with a belt (70%), the hand (31%), a slipper (27%), a whip (5%), a paddle (5%), a shoe (5%), and a switch (3%). Reasons given for the punishment included disobedience (27%), not doing homework or poor performance at school (29%) and talking back or being rude (12%).

(Pineda, N. et al., 2005, *Evaluación de Algunas Modalidades de Atención a la Primera Infancia en el ICBF y el DABS*, Bogotá, Cinde, Save the Children UK, UNICEF, Colombian Institute for Family Welfare and Bogotá Social Welfare Department, reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

COSTA RICA

In 2003, a survey by the Paniamor Foundation of 1,034 school children aged 9-16 found that nearly half (47.8%) experienced physical punishment occasionally in the home, while 4.2% experienced it frequently, more so for boys than girls in both cases; 11% said they had been punished in the past 15 days. The reasons given for being punished were mainly concerned with correcting behaviour: “they behave badly” (71.5%), “they don’t do as they are told” (22.7%), “to educate” (5.8%). Most punishment was administered by parents (mother 78%, father 77%), but was also given by grandparents (20%), older siblings (20%), uncles (19%), caregivers (16%), teachers (12%), domestic workers (9%), and the school principal (8%). When asked how they feel when they are punished, the most frequent responses were sadness (79.2%), pain (56.7%), fear (42.6%), guilt (39.8%) and loneliness (37.1%). The large majority of children viewed corporal punishment negatively, with almost two out of five children saying it is very bad and almost a third saying that people should not be punished in this way.

(Paniamor Foundation/Save the Children Sweden, 2004, “National Survey of Children and Adolescents on Physical Punishment”, part of project “Prevencion de la Violencia desde la Familia y la Adolescencia”, presented at Costa Rica, March 2004)

HONDURAS

According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, of girls and women aged 15-49, 16% think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

MEXICO

A report on institutions including psychiatric hospitals and shelters in Mexico found that children and adults with disabilities are kept in permanent restraints, and that this constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and sometimes torture.

(Rosenthal, E., Jehn, E., Galván, S. et al, 2010, *Abandoned & Disappeared: Mexico's Segregation and Abuse of Children and Adults with Disabilities*, Disability Rights International & Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos)

NICARAGUA

According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, of girls and women aged 15-49, 17% think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.

(UNICEF, 2009, *Progress for Children: A report card on child protection*, NY: UNICEF)

Surveys carried out in 2002-2004 examined the attitudes of children and adults in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela towards physical punishment. In Nicaragua, 260 children were surveyed. Nearly a third (33.1%) of the children agreed that children should not be physically punished or that "punishment does not solve anything", and nearly a quarter (24.6%) agreed that physical punishment is "very bad" or "makes children violent". Fifty-eight per cent thought that physical punishment is never necessary.

(Save the Children Sweden & Instituto de Encuestas y Sondeos de Opinión, 2005, *Sistematización de las Encuestas Sobre la Percepción del Castigo Físico en Seis Países de America Latina*, presentation: Managua, 16 May 2005)

PANAMA

A report on juvenile detention centres in Panama found that inmates were regularly subjected to very severe corporal punishment including beatings, the use of tear gas, being shot with rubber bullets and threatened with rifles. Other cruel and degrading punishments included the denial of family visits and imprisonment in very small cells with little water. The report was based on visits to four detention centres, which together housed 268 juvenile detainees, approximately 82% of the total population of the juvenile detention system.

(Harvard International Human Rights Clinic, Alianza Ciudadana Pro Justicia & Asamblea Ciudadana de Panamá, 2011, *Preventable Tragedy in Panama: Unnecessary Deaths and Rights Violations in Juvenile Detention Centers*, report submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for its 57th session)

PARAGUAY

A survey carried out after a two-month long UNICEF campaign designed to raise awareness about family violence against children and provide parents with information about positive parenting asked 753 parents about their childrearing opinions and practices. When asked what discipline strategy they used the most, 57.1% of parents said they talked to their children, compared to 55.6% before the campaign. Just over one parent in ten (11.5%) said they shouted or raised their voice, compared to one in five (20.4%) before the campaign. Before the campaign, 3.6% of parents said they most often “used a belt or other object”; after the campaign, 0.9% said this. After the campaign, nearly nine out of ten parents (88.9%) believed it was possible to bring up children without hitting them or using verbal violence, compared to 76.6% before the campaign. One in ten (10.2%) did not think it was possible, compared to one in five (20.3%) before the campaign. Seven in ten (70.3%) of those interviewed remembered the campaign. Of these, 46.5% thought that the campaign would influence their friends’ and neighbours’ way of bringing up children a lot, and 34% a little.

(First Analysis y Estudios, 2010, *Sin Violencia si Educa Mejor: medición comparativa post campaña*, UNICEF)

A 2010 UNICEF study found that 61% of respondents had experienced violence or other kinds of mistreatment from their closest family members. The study, the first of its kind in Paraguay, involved over 800 children and young people aged 10-18, attending 54 private and public schools in different areas of the country. 35% of respondents had experienced severe physical violence (being hit with objects, kicked, burned or suffocated) in their families and 13% had experienced “light” physical violence (including slaps, having their hair pulled and being forced to stay in uncomfortable positions). 13% had experienced psychological violence such as insults and threats of abandonment. The physical violence had serious consequences, with 13% of respondents reporting being hit until they bled and 7.7% needing medical attention due to violence. More than half of the study participants remembered that they began to experience family violence at between 3 and 5 years old. Boys experienced more severe physical violence than girls, while girls experienced more psychological violence than boys. Physical and psychological violence was experienced by children of all social classes, although children at public and subsidised schools experienced more physical violence than children in private schools, while children in private schools experienced more psychological violence than their publicly schooled peers. Parents with a higher level of education were less likely to use physical violence – for example, 23.9% of mothers and 26.8% of fathers who had been to university used severe physical violence as a punishment, compared to 46.8% of mothers and 55.6% of fathers who had not been to school. The results of the study suggested that, as mothers spend more time with their children than fathers, mothers use physical violence more often than fathers. However, mothers were more likely to decrease their use of physical violence as their children grew older, while fathers were more likely to use a greater degree of violence than mothers and to continue to use it at the same level as their children grew older. Mothers who spent less time with their children used most physical violence – 27.7% of those who spent all day at home used severe physical violence, compared to 39.6% of other mothers who spent only some hours of the day or some days of the week at home. The study recommended that more research be done on this topic and on the various demands placed on mothers who work both inside and outside the home.

PERU

A survey of 1,000 adults in 15 cities by Ipsos Apoyo, published by El Comercio, found that 42% of the respondents agreed with using corporal punishment “occasionally” to discipline children. Over half (56%) were against physical punishment.

(Reported in *Living in Peru*, 27 September 2009, www.livinginperu.com/news/10206)

In 2004, interviews were carried out with 870 female carers of children below the age of 10 years (95% mothers, 5% aunts, cousins and grandmothers) from six communities, as part of a project sponsored by Save the Children Canada and Save the Children UK to establish a community network for the eradication of corporal punishment. The majority (80%) believed corporal punishment necessary to educate their children; 52% believed ear pulling, slapping, or hitting with a belt or stick acceptable; and 20% believed corporal punishment helps children learn to obey. Just over a quarter (27%) felt that corporal punishment was not good but used it nevertheless, while only 16% stated that they did not use corporal punishment. In interviews with young children (aged 4-5 years), 96% reported having been physically punished for “bad behaviour”.

(Base line project sponsored by Save the Children Canada and Save the Children UK in San Juan de Lurigancho – Lima, reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

In 2002, Save the Children surveyed 1,555 children and adolescents and 689 teachers, parents and other adults who work with children. Nearly half the children (48.2%) reported being “occasionally” punished in the home, 5.1% “frequently”, 30.4% “never”. The responses from adults were comparable, with 46.9% stating that they had been “occasionally” punished in their homes, 11.2% “frequently”, and 23.5% “never”. Just under one in five (18.8%) reported being “occasionally” punished in school, 1.8% “frequently”, and 39.7% “never” – but 39.7% did not respond regarding school corporal punishment. Boys reported being punished more often than girls in school (23% compared with 13%).

(Reported in International Save the Children Alliance, 2005, *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children – Making it Happen: Global Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children*, Save the Children Sweden)

VENEZUELA

Surveys carried out in 2002-2004 examined the attitudes of children and adults in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela towards physical punishment. In Venezuela, 889 people were surveyed (685 children and 204 adults). Nearly half (46.8%) of the children and 30.2% of the adults agreed that physical punishment is “very bad” or “makes children violent”, and 13.4% of the children and 35.1% of the adults agreed that children should not be physically punished or that “punishment does not solve anything”. More than eight in ten adults (83.4%) and 71.2% of children thought that physical punishment is never necessary.

(Save the Children Sweden & Instituto de Encuestas y Sondeos de Opinión, 2005, *Sistematización de las Encuestas Sobre la Percepción del Castigo Físico en Seis Países de America Latina*, presentation: Managua, 16 May 2005)