

Spanking sparks aggression, does little to reduce behavior problems

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Discipline -- whether it's spanking, yelling or giving time-outs -- may sometimes do little to reduce children's behavior problems, a new study indicates.

Researchers at the University of Michigan and five other universities looked at practices and perceptions of discipline in six countries. They found that spanking leads to more child [aggression](#) and anxiety, regardless of the country.

So what should parents do to teach [children](#) right from wrong?

"It may be that the long-term investments that we make in children, like spending time with them, showing that we love them and listening to them, have a more powerful positive effect on behavior than any form of discipline," said Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, U-M associate professor of [social work](#).

The study, appearing in the March/April issue of the journal [Child Development](#), examined the associations of mothers' discipline techniques with children's aggressive and anxious behaviors in China, India, Italy, Kenya, Thailand and the Philippines.

Unlike other studies, this project collected information from both mothers and their children. Participants included 292 mothers and their 8- to 12-year-old children.

Researchers used the sample to address two questions:

--When multiple discipline techniques are considered at the same time, which forms of discipline emerge as having the strongest associations with children's aggressive and anxious behaviors?

--Are significant associations between discipline practices and child behaviors moderated by the extent to which mothers and children perceive these practices to be normal in their communities?

The 11 discipline techniques analyzed included: teach about good and bad behavior; get child to apologize; give a time-out; take away privileges, spank; express disappointment; shame; yell/scold; withdraw love for misbehavior; threaten punishment; and promise a treat/privilege.

Mothers and children were asked about the frequency with which others in their communities used each discipline technique.

"When children perceive a discipline technique to be (normal) within their culture or community, they may be less likely to evaluate their parents' use of it as aberrant or objectionable," Grogan-Kaylor said.

The research, he said, showed that the relationship of some kinds of discipline with [behavior problems](#) varied according to how common that type of discipline was used in the community. However, despite small variations, there was a strong consistency in the results across countries.

The bottom line: giving a time-out, using corporal punishment, expressing disappointment and shaming were significantly related to greater child anxiety symptoms. Child aggression resulted from spanking, expressing [disappointment](#) and yelling.

Provided by University of Michigan

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